

# NeuroWild Shift



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Please deliver it to your child's teacher and coordinator.

I want this resource to make its way into every school.

The more teachers who are neurodiversity-informed,  
the better.



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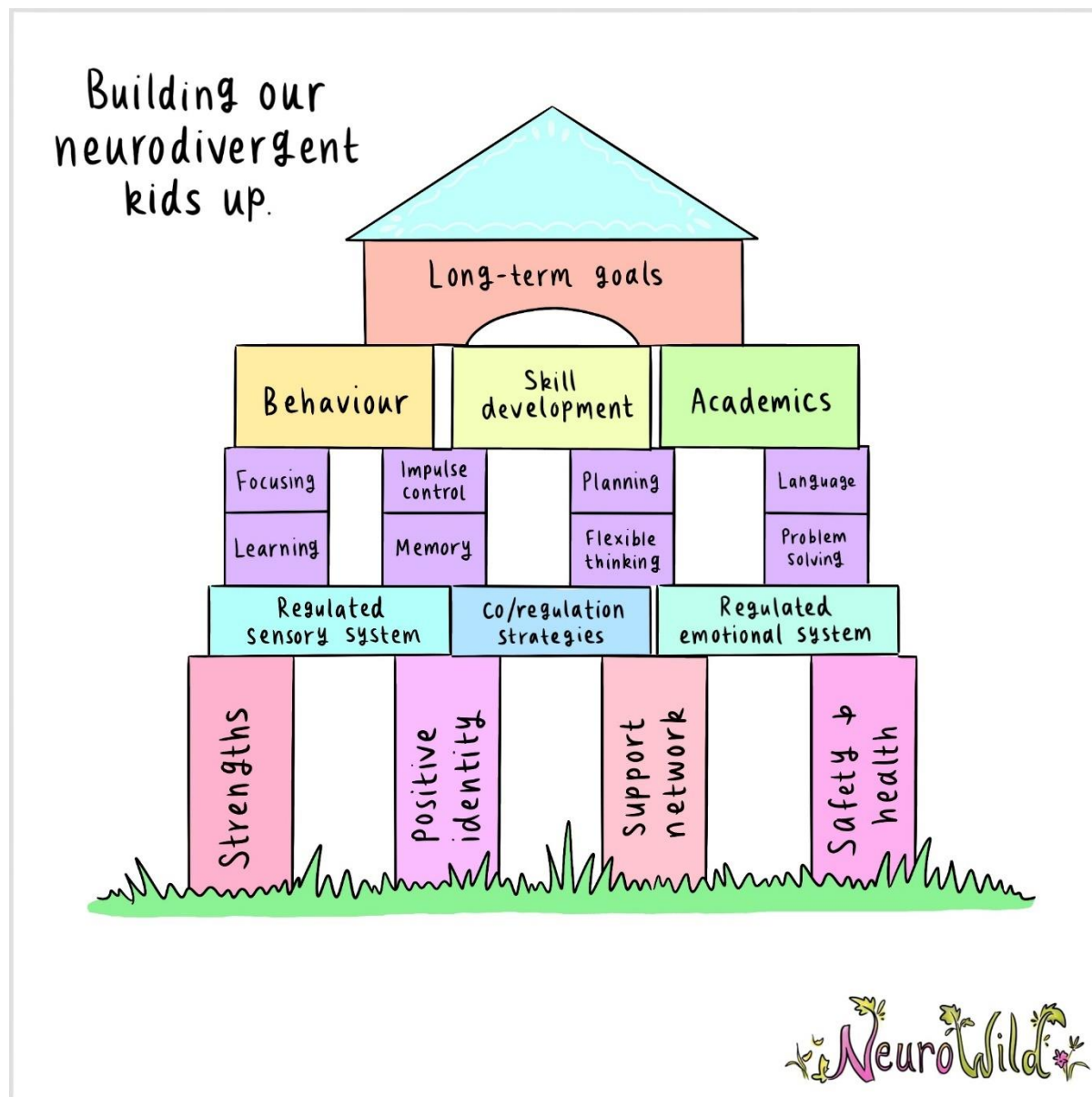
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## The NeuroWild Shift

An information package for educators, school staff, parents, and professionals.



### Sensory Processing

Your neurodivergent students may have significant sensory processing systems compared to their neurotypical peers. They may be highly sensitive to certain sensory input, such as light, sound, smells, temperature, and textures. These stimuli can easily cause overwhelm and dysregulation, especially when combined/accumulated.

Some neurodivergent students may also have very low sensitivity to other types of sensory input. These students may have a very high pain threshold, and lower awareness of internal body cues (such as hunger, thirst, bathroom, sickness, etc).

To complicate things, many students will have dynamic, fluctuating sensory needs. This means that strategies for sensory support need to be dynamic and flexible. One particular strategy will not work every time. It is often very difficult for a student to know which particular sensory stimuli are the cause of their overwhelm, and it can be very hard to know which strategies might be effective for regulation.

Tip: have a large bank of sensory regulation strategies and tools available for the student. Use visuals and encourage them to pay attention to their body- how it feels and what it needs. Strategies need to be accessible at all times and are not contingent on behaviour, productivity, or compliance.

Supporting sensory needs should happen **proactively, not reactively**. Once a student is dysregulated it can be difficult to help them return to a place of good learning.

Accommodations need to be implemented to **prevent** a student becoming dysregulated, e.g. headphones during writing/assembly, cold water available in class, alternative seating options for movement-based learning, limited use of scented air-fresheners/cleaners, gloves available for gluing/painting, regular movement breaks and then additional breaks as needed, etc.

The bottom line: a ND student cannot do good learning when they are dysregulated. First step is to address regulation- then you can look to other goals/expectations.

## **Emotional Processing**

Neurodivergent students may have significant differences in the way they process and respond to emotions. You may notice a neurodivergent student experiencing a large emotional response to situations such as:

- Losing a game
- Not meeting an expectation (such as perfect marks in a test)
- Making a mistake
- Being the centre of attention
- Having the routine change
- Not finishing a task
- Having a problem



- Being confronted with something new
- Having issues with a peer

When comparing the emotional responses of neurodivergent students to neurotypical peers, the response of the neurodivergent student may be significantly more intense and prolonged. It is this comparison that often leads adults to label the neurodivergent student's emotional response as an 'overreaction'. Neurodivergent students are often expected to manage their emotions much better than they are neurologically able to- because they are compared to age-matched peers who do not experience the same emotional-processing challenges.

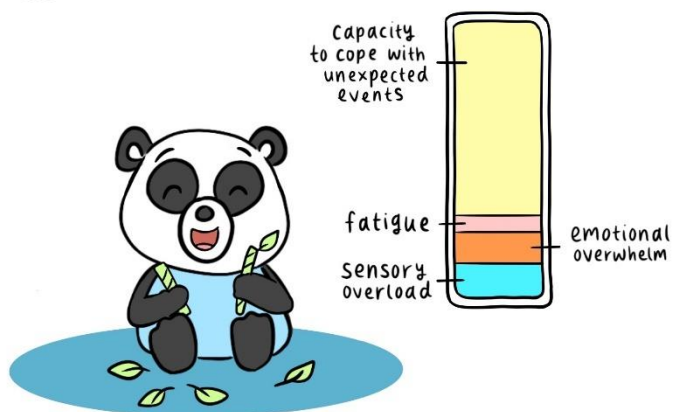
It's important to know that our neurodivergent students are not 'overreacting' when they exhibit a large emotional response, even if the situation seems trivial to the adult eye. They are simply reacting with the (often) hypersensitive processing system that they have. Just as important is the understanding that they are not making a conscious choice to react 'poorly'.

We remember, always, that kids do well if they can (*Dr Ross Greene*). This means that sometimes our neurodivergent kids are able to react to a situation with logic and composure. And sometimes, that same situation will result in a significant emotional response. It's not a question of effort, it is a reflection of the mental and emotional capacity of that student in that moment.





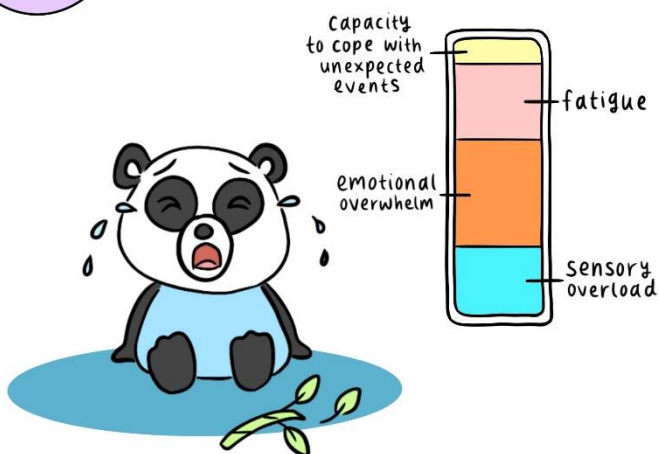
On this occasion, Panda had the capacity to handle this well.



What happens when fatigue, and overwhelm are bigger?



This time, Panda was too tired and overwhelmed to cope with this unexpected situation.



Check his bar - this response is not a choice. He's coping the best he can.



When our neurodivergent kids are experiencing large emotional responses, they need additional support in the way of:

- Coregulation
- Demands reduced
- Sensory Safety
- Empathy

They do not need to be shamed or punished for experiencing a big emotional response.

In terms of goals for emotional regulation/development, focus on goals that support Sensory Safety, access to accommodations, listening to your body cues, building awareness of safe and unsafe situations, mental energy expenditure, and building a positive neurodivergent identity.


Teach the whole class that people experience emotions in different ways, because no two people are the same. We all have different brains, different learning styles, different personalities, different preferences, different appearances, different strengths and challenges. There is not one ideal way to exist. All ways are ok, and when everyone can accept and find the value in difference, the world will be much kinder.

Note: many neurodivergent students will work hard to conceal any struggles that they experience at school. They use every ounce of their mental and emotional energy meeting expectations, silently enduring sensory stress, and masking neurodivergent traits. These kids often appear fine at school but then break once they get home. Unfortunately, when parents raise this issue with schools, we are often told that it is a 'home problem' and nothing to do with school.

Students who are in this position are likely to experience burnout, which is likely to keep them from attending school at all.

They require suitable accommodations to ensure their sensory safety and wellbeing at school.



Why meltdowns happen after school. 

Being at school is not the priority.  
Being OK at school is.



## **Interoception**

Interoception refers to our body's internal cues, such as hunger, thirst, temperature, bathroom cues, illness, fatigue, etc. Many neurodivergent students may have differences in how readily they recognise and interpret these internal cues. For some, they may not notice that they are hungry until their tummy starts hurting- and even then, they may not recognise that this sensation is hunger, and that they should eat something. Some students won't feel that they need the bathroom until they are practically bursting, at which point their need is urgent and they are unable to wait any longer. Some students won't identify that their body is too hot or too cold, and will not add or remove clothing to reflect these temperature changes. Conversely, some students may receive these internal cues with much more intensity and frequency, for example, a student who feels the need to go to the bathroom urgently every 15 minutes.

Unrecognised/unaddressed internal cues cause dysregulation. Dysregulation prevents neurodivergent students from doing their best learning.

### **How can you support neurodivergent students with Interoception?**

Encourage students to take time to notice how their body feels. This can be done during mindfulness or meditation. Have discussions about how everybody is different, and people need different things at different times. Our brain and body work together to keep us safe and happy, and it's important to tune in to our needs. This is something we can practice.



Tired? Pain? Temp?

Thoughts? Worries?  
Ideas? 😊/☹️

Sounds? 😊/☹️

Messages? 😊/☹️

Breathing? 😊/☹️

Full? Uncomfortable?  
Pain?

Messages?

Smells? 😊/☹️

Heart rate? 😊/☹️

Hungry/full? Empty?  
Sick, noisy, sore? 😊/☹️

Temp? Energy?

Interoception Check  
Any quiet or loud messages?

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Check in with neurodivergent students- wonder aloud if anyone might benefit from a drink, snack, or bathroom break before coming back into class or before the bus. Model language around temperature changes, e.g. *'My body feels really hot after running. I'm going to take my jumper off so I can cool down a bit. Anyone else need to take their jumper off?'*

It's important not to pressure neurodivergent students into adding or removing clothes based on your own perception of temperature. Their brain can literally process temperature in a different way to yours. However, it's important for all students to spend time checking in with their body cues, in case there's a quiet message there that wasn't yet heard.

If a student checks in with their body and still does not want to put a jumper on, that is their right.

Students should be encouraged to listen to their bodies and speak up for their needs when necessary. Bathroom/drink breaks always need to be allowed. If a student expresses that they are overheating, adults should allow them to cool down.

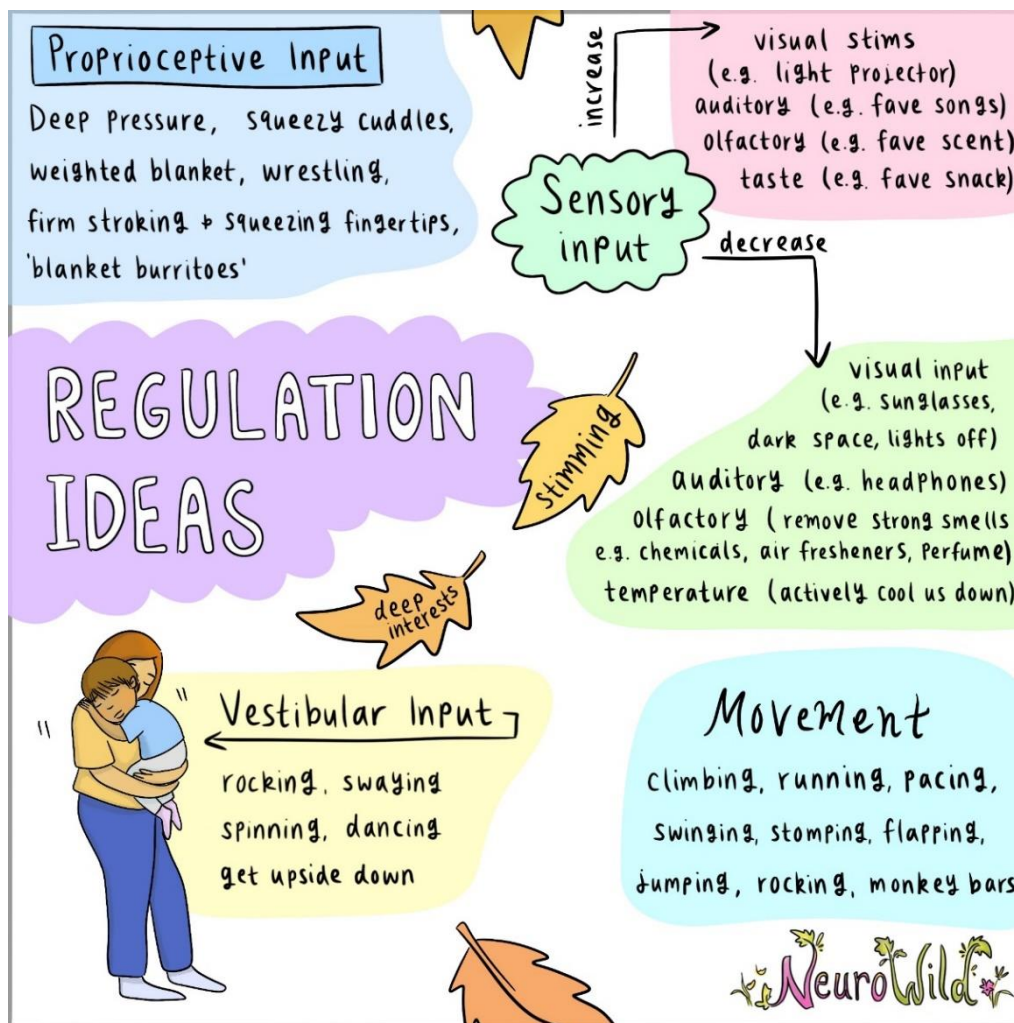
## **Regulation**

When we are 'regulated' our energy levels match the energy requirements of the task. So 'regulated' does not always mean 'calm'. Running, jumping, and laughing are not necessarily actions that are well-matched to an activity such as writing an essay. Whereas running, jumping, and laughing would not necessarily be out-of-place during sport or recess.

When we talk about regulation strategies, we are talking about different ways to try and bring our energy levels closer to the energy requirements of the task.

Here are some examples of regulation strategies to try.





Important: neurodivergent kids need access to a wide range of regulation strategies and supports, and they should not have an imposed time limit. Having them choose between two or three 'approved' strategies/supports will likely be ineffective- using a fidget spinner or having a drink of water is unlikely to help with dysregulation caused by a scratchy tag, loud fan, or bright lights. Restricting their time to regulate (e.g. 'you can use that for 3 minutes and then you need to come back to your desk') will likely be ineffective. Our bodies are not appliances- our nervous system doesn't run on a clock.

As mentioned previously, students should have their sensory needs supported **proactively**, not **reactively**. It's about doing our best to prevent dysregulation from occurring. This means removing known triggers, reducing sensory stress, having access to accommodations.

## **Quick list of things that can cause dysregulation in neurodivergent students**

### **Sensory overload**

Can be specific triggers, can be due to complexity of input e.g. cumulative impact of sounds, smells, lights, temperature, textures

### **Emotional stress**

For example: disappointment, frustration, excitement, worry, fear, sadness, loneliness, embarrassment, anxiety, etc.

### **Expectations not met**

For example: plans not working, routine changing, unexpected outcomes

### **Masking**

For example: neurodivergent students forcing their bodies to be still when they actually need to move to focus, forcing eye contact (which can significantly reduce their capacity to process instructions/information), closely mimicking the mannerisms of peers to seem more 'normal', intentionally avoiding stimming

### **Physical exhaustion, illness, fatigue**

## **Executive Functioning Skills**

Executive Functioning Skills refers to high-level skills such as problem-solving, memory, listening, comprehension, analysis, perspective-taking, impulse-control, logic, and learning.

Many of our neurodivergent students will have significant differences in these areas, especially when compared to neurotypical peers. For example, an Autistic student may find it difficult solving common problems (such as how to clean up a spill) but be able to complete complex mathematical equations far above their grade level. An ADHDer may have phenomenal language skills but find time-management and task initiation extremely challenging.

### **Things to remember about Executive Functioning skills:**

They are not static. The extent to which our ND kids can access their EF skills fluctuates quite a lot.

Giving consequences (or the absence of rewards) when ND kids are unable to access their EF skills is not going to help them develop those skills. It is likely to create shame, frustration, and can significantly reduce the mental wellbeing of our ND kids in classrooms. It can also create a very negative relationship with learning, school, and the teacher. Many of our ND kids end up in a cycle of 'school can't', where they do not feel safe or able to attend school. Understanding these kids, their processing differences, their strengths and challenges, their fluctuating capacity- is essential in creating a safe place for them to access mainstream education.



## Autism is a dynamic Disability.

Part of that Disability is having difficulty with EXECUTIVE FUNCTION skills.

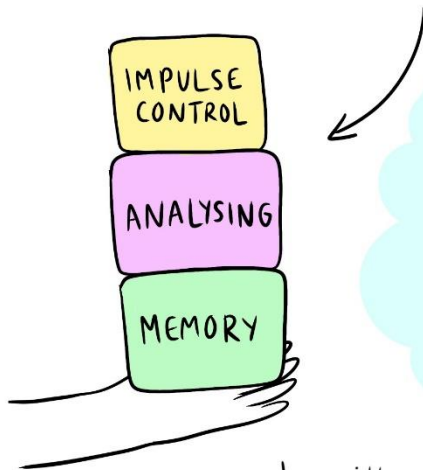
The Executive Function skills that I have trouble with are highlighted below.

Focusing	Flexible thinking	Planning
Controlling impulses	Coping with transitions	Adapting
Memory	Making decisions	Prioritising
Coping with hard things	Predicting	Inferencing
Identifying solutions	Managing emotional response	Analysing
Perspective-taking	Initiating + stopping a task	Problem solving
Sequencing	Comprehension	Learning

Many Neurodivergent people have differences when it comes to Executive Function skills. Even when I try my best, I may not be able to demonstrate these skills.



When I am WELL-REGULATED, I am often able to access + demonstrate the Executive Function skills that I have.

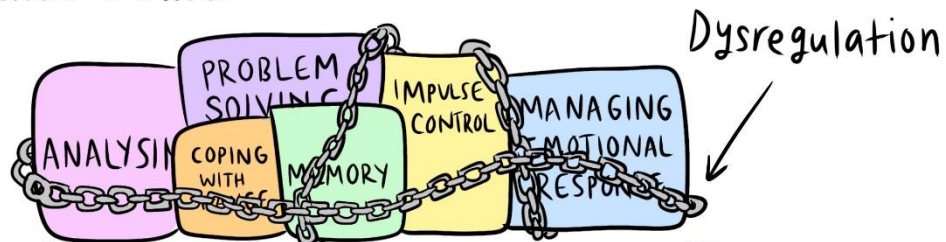


KIDS DO WELL  
WHEN THEY CAN

DR. ROSS GREENE

I will need accommodations and support for the Executive Function skills that I am lacking. Additionally - I hope my adults can show me empathy and kindness when I struggle. It can be upsetting for me when my best isn't good enough.

When I am DYSREGULATED, I cannot effectively access the Executive Function skills that I have.



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Most school tasks require these Executive Function skills. If I am dysregulated, I will likely struggle with many of them. This may look like:

Not following instructions

Not following school rules

Not attempting schoolwork

Calling out, not waiting turn

Appearing very lethargic

Overcome with big feelings

Difficulty focusing on work

Large responses to situations

Procrastinating

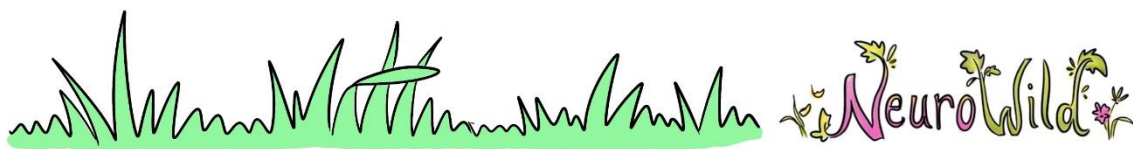
Explosive behaviour

Forgetting instructions

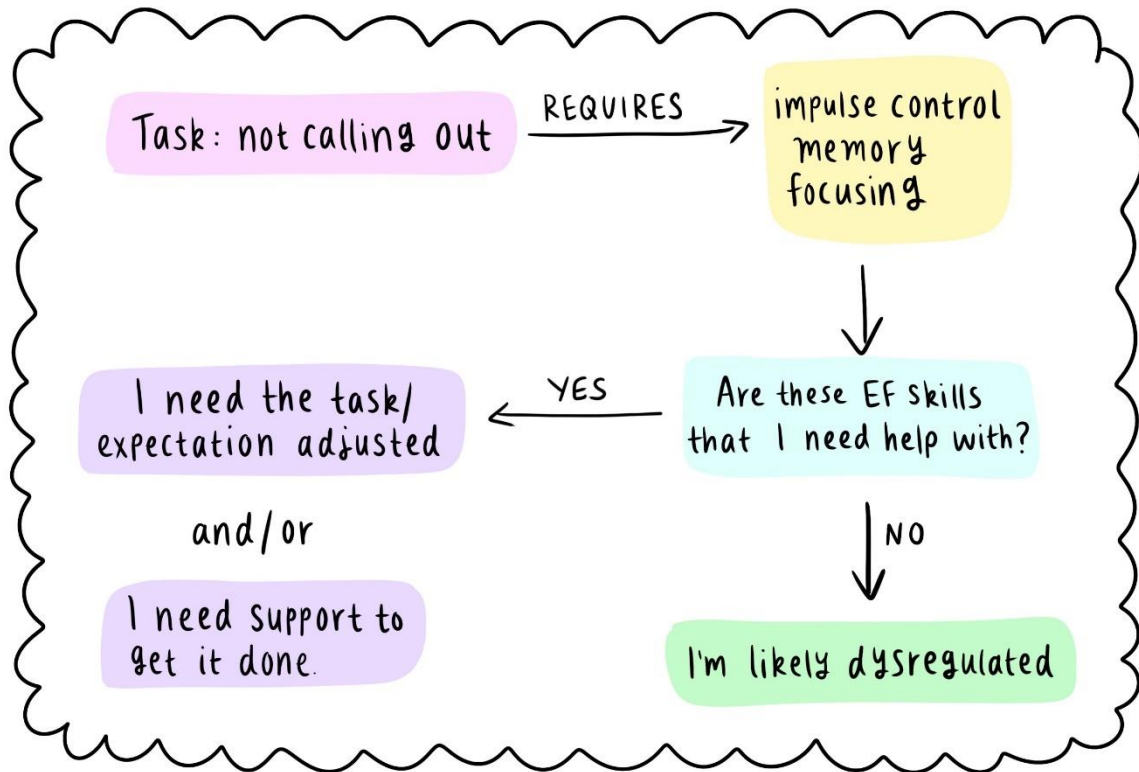
Struggling with peers

If you notice any of these signals:

Encourage regulation strategies e.g. Stimming, movement, break, walk, fidget tool, drink, fresh air, quiet time, screen time, headphones, etc.

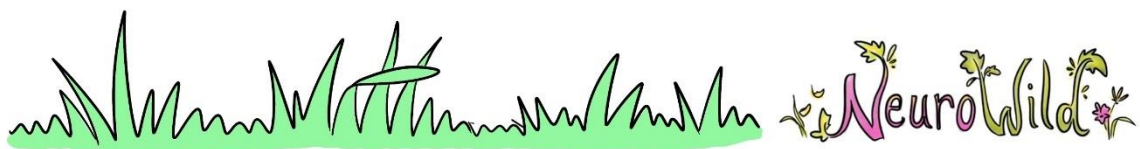


And check that I have all the Executive Function skills required to do the task.



If I don't have the opportunity to regulate,  
I may end up in extreme Neurodivergent distress  
(often still referred to as meltdowns or shutdowns.)

Extreme distress is not an Autistic trait -  
it indicates significant unmet needs.



If we remember that:

well-regulated = ↑ EF skills = more effective learning

Dysregulated = ↓ EF skills = difficulty with many tasks

We can see how essential REGULATION is.

## Things that may cause DYSREGULATION

### Masking

- Forced eye contact
- Forcing body to be still
- Over-socialising

Emotions - disappointment, anger, sadness, frustration, confusion, embarrassment, excitement, worry

### Sensory

- Sound
- Light
- Temperature
- Smells, Tastes, Textures

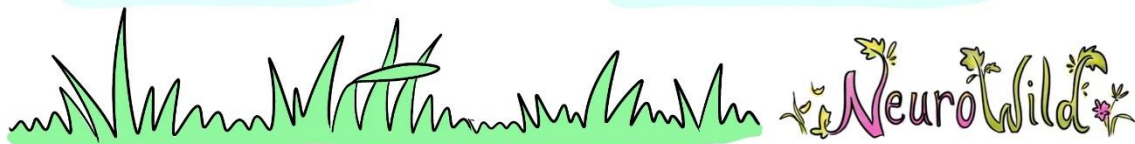
Illness + tiredness

Mental fatigue

Unexpected change

Discomfort

Unmet needs that I can't easily identify or communicate



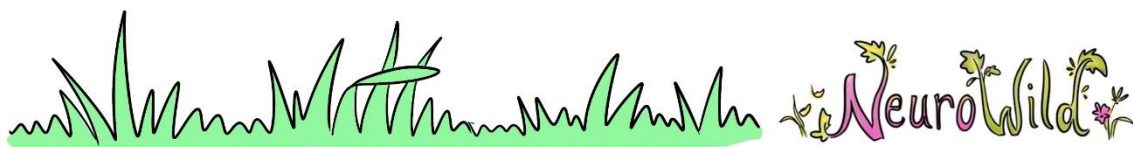
# Top Tips for Helping Me THRIVE at School

Support + encourage REGULATION at all times.  
Ensure unlimited access to tools + strategies.  
Well-regulated = ready to LEARN.

Help prevent dysregulation by having tools available  
e.g. headphones, fidgets, different seating options.

Ensure I don't miss breaks for any reason.  
If I was unable to complete work, or access  
my EF skills (to meet expectations), this indicates  
that I am dysregulated and in great need of  
that break.

If I am having trouble with tasks or expectations,  
this indicates that I may be lacking the required skills,  
AND/OR I am unable to access those skills due to  
dysregulation.

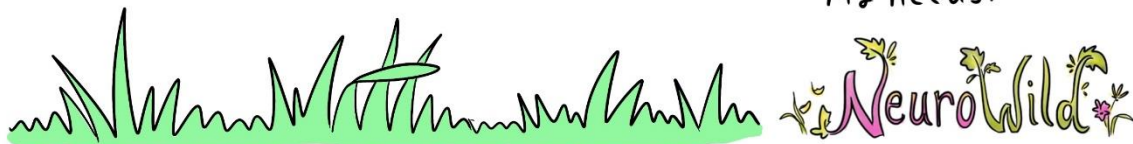


# ABOUT ME ... \_\_\_\_\_

Things that make me annoyed, sad, overwhelmed, or uncomfortable:

Some ways I like to regulate:

Thank you for understanding my needs.



## Supporting Executive Functioning Skill development

- Understand that neurodivergent kids will develop executive functioning skills at different rates and trajectories. Do not compare them to a neurotypical timeline about when they 'should' have mastered a particular skill.
- Remove behaviour charts and systems- Our kids do well if they can (Dr Ross Greene). If they're not doing well, they need support (not shame).
- Sensory accommodations to reduce overwhelm and increase access to available executive functioning skills.
- Build sensory safety.
- Flexible expectations.
- Modify tasks (e.g. break down into steps, simplify, offer different modalities for completing tasks, incorporate deep interests).
- Scaffold with examples.
- Encourage teaming up to work collaboratively.
- Model the skills.
- Provide reminders.
- Use visuals.
- Create a safe environment where kids can ask questions and make mistakes.
- Develop a classroom culture where difference is valued and celebrated.

There are many reasons why a student may have difficulty 'doing the thing'. It's essential that adults do not assume that a neurodivergent student is being intentionally uncooperative when they do not meet expectations. That is likely not the case. Many times we can be trying our best but still struggle to meet expectations or 'do the thing'. It's not a matter of effort or attitude. Fluctuating capacity and executive functioning differences are simply part of our disability.



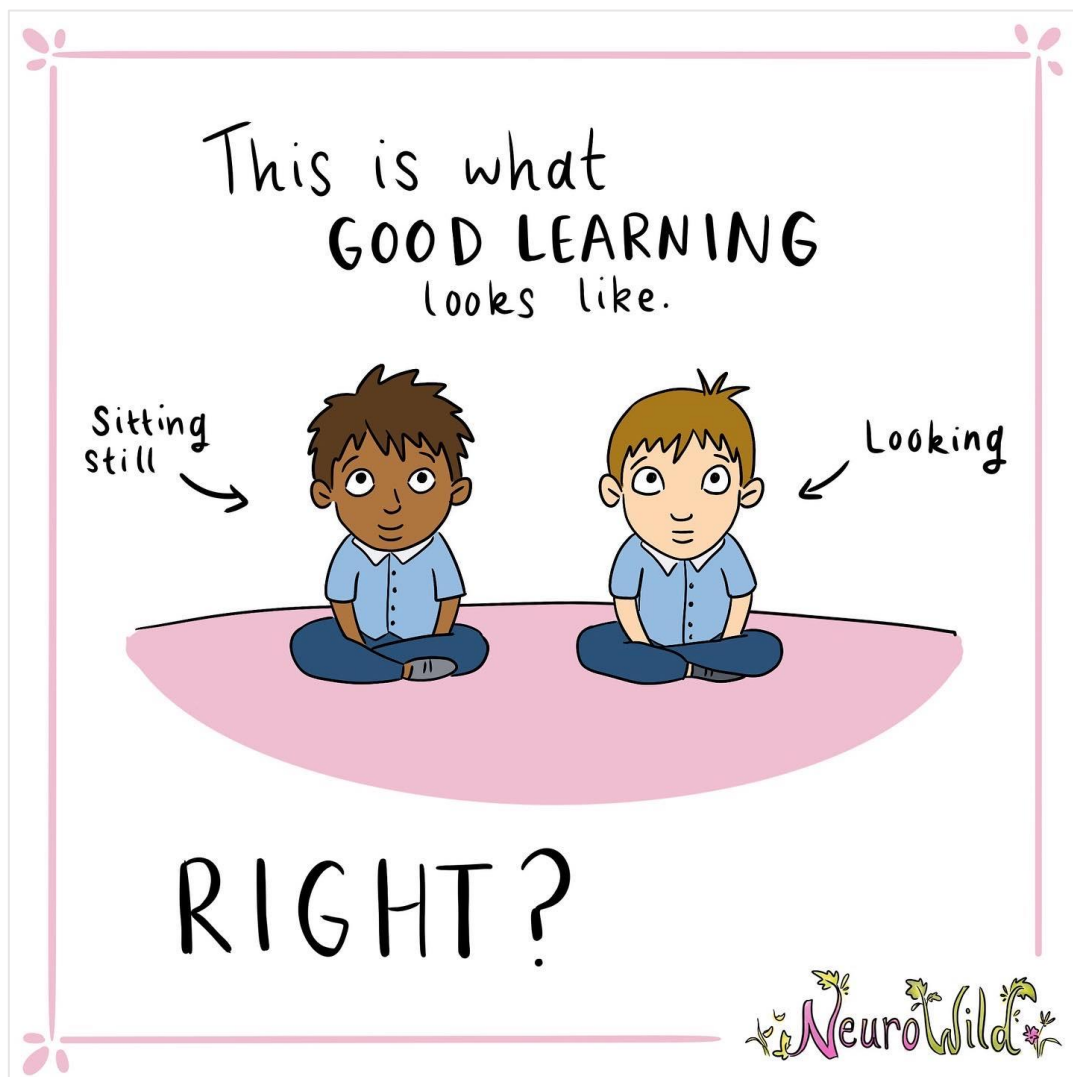
### Key Considerations

- Sensory processing
- Emotional processing
- Interoception
- Regulation
- Executive functioning skills
- Self-image and mental health
- Fluctuating capacity
- Demands and expectations
- Social communication style

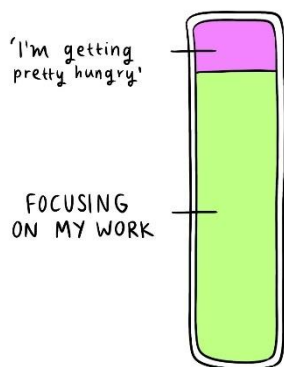
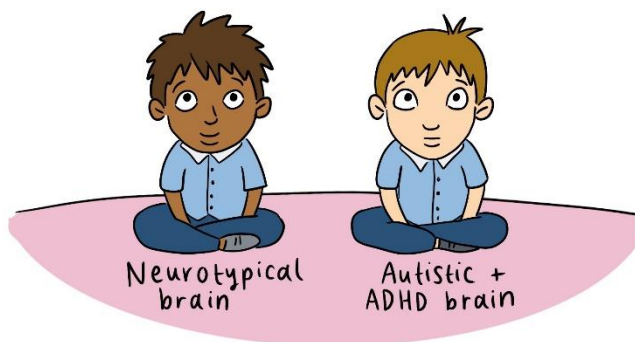
- Learning style
- School history and trauma

## Good Learning

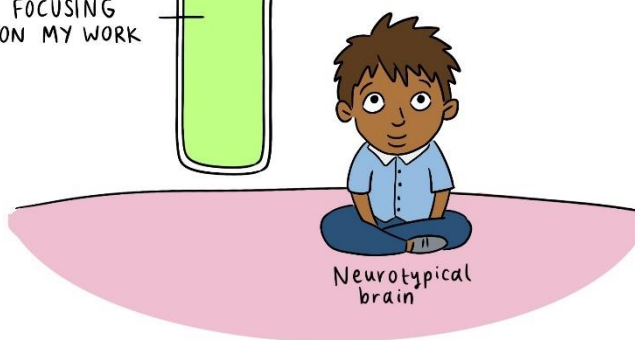
An infographic.



Let's have a CLOSER look  
at these two brains...



This child can  
FOCUS on LEARNING  
when he is STILL +  
LOOKING.



This is what GOOD LEARNING  
looks like for this child.



'Must not get in trouble'

'That fan is SO LOUD and that flickering light hurts my eyes'

'Must keep eyes on teacher. Ouch. Don't look away. Ouch. MUST LOOK!'

'Must stay still. Don't move. Don't move.'

'OW. THIS TAG'

FOCUSING ON MY WORK

This child CANNOT FOCUS on LEARNING when he is STILL + LOOKING.

Autistic + ADHD brain

This is NOT what GOOD LEARNING looks like for this child.

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If the main goal is GOOD LEARNING...

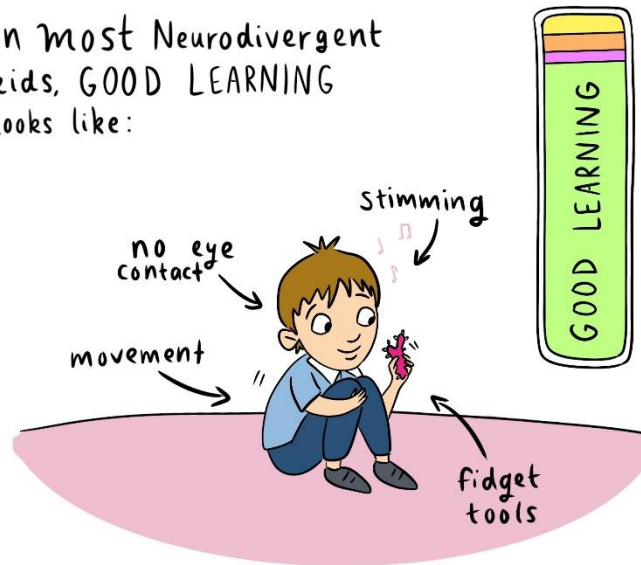
GOOD LEARNING

GOOD LEARNING

Neurodivergent kids can't be asked to do this

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In most Neurodivergent kids, GOOD LEARNING looks like:



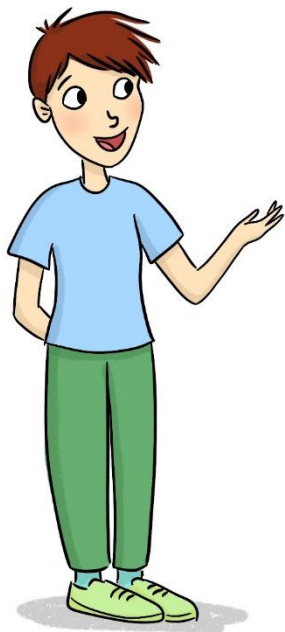
This is the RIGHT WAY for this child to LEARN.



It's important to remember that GOOD LEARNING doesn't always look the same for each kid.



The NeuroWild Shift is a respectful, affirming approach that recognises fluctuating capacity in neurodivergent students, and prioritises safety, wellbeing, self esteem, and a positive relationship with learning.



### NeuroWild Shift

1. I see you.
2. I hear you.
3. I got you.

When you see a student not meeting your expectation, commence the NeuroWild Shift.



Welcome to the **NeuroWild Shift**.

The NeuroWild Shift is a simple three-step approach for supporting neurodivergent students who experience fluctuating capacity. Teachers can use these three steps right in the moment to ensure that neurodivergent students are building a positive relationship with learning.

It is not about having all the answers in the moment, but rather, choosing a path forward that is not going to damage the mental wellbeing of the student.

Teachers are encouraged to think more holistically about the student when they get a chance, diving deeper into the challenges that they are having, and exploring more robust supports.



# 1. I see you.

Observation stage.

What do you see the student doing/ not doing?

E.g. Student isn't starting work



Share your observations with the student.

"Hey, I notice you haven't made a start on the work."

It's important that all steps are done in a positive, non-judgemental way.

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It is essential that your language, tone, and expression remain neutral/positive. Your student should not be thinking that this interaction is going to get them in trouble. You're just starting a conversation.

## 2. I hear you.

### Listening stage

Invite the student to share their perspective.

I wonder what's holding you up here?

Hey, what's going on?

- They may have a specific issue that is easily fixed e.g. needing a pencil
- They may give a more complex reason, e.g. It's too hard, it's too boring, I don't want to, I don't get it.
- They may only be able to shrug.

I can't do it.



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Note: This step is there so the student can explain their difficulty **if they choose to**.

A student does **not** have to participate in this step if they don't choose to/don't feel like they can explain it. If a student shrugs or says 'I don't know', this does not mean that nothing is wrong. It simply means that they can't explain what is impacting their capacity in this moment.

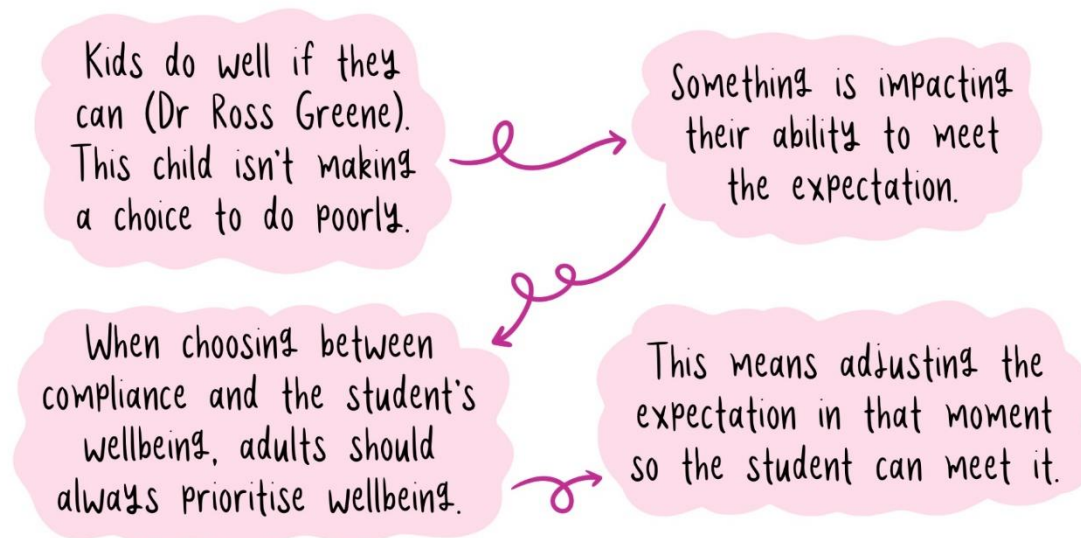
If a student can explain their reason, great. That's important qualitative data that can inform future decision-making.

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### 3. I got you.

#### Adjustment stage

It can be very hard to know why a student is having difficulty meeting an expectation. Teachers often won't have time in the moment to have a long conversation about it. Keep the following things in mind:



Plus opportunity for extension



This step is about connection and safety. The student should feel safe in their classroom even on days when they are working with less capacity. They need their teacher to understand that 'their best' looks different at different times. When their best is below expectation, our neurodivergent students should not be shamed for that. Fluctuating capacity is a significant part of their disability.



In the I GOT YOU stage, teachers adjust the expectation so the student can meet it in that moment.

## WHY?

Because it's important that ND students regularly experience a sense of achievement with school things, even on days when they have lower mental capacity.

Because it's harmful for ND students to learn that having fluctuating capacity is something to be ashamed of.

Because ND kids need to feel understood and safe with their teacher.

Because safety and comfort increase our ND students' capacity to follow instructions and learn.



In this stage teachers **adjust** the expectation so that the student can succeed. The teacher tells the student the new expectation in a positive/neutral way. There is no displeasure or disappointment- only a teacher who recognises fluctuating capacity. When the student meets the expectation, teachers should respond the same way that they respond when any student meets any expectation.

Some days the teacher may do a lot of adjusting, and some days they won't.



# ADJUSTING EXPECTATIONS can look like...

## Modifying the task

### Adjust work quantity

E.g. You're right, 10 words does feel like a lot sometimes. I wonder if you could get 5 done?

### Adjust work difficulty

E.g. I get it, division can feel really hard. I'll walk you through the steps and you can just calculate. Does that sound OK?

### Change modality

E.g. Maybe you would like to tell me the answers instead of writing them down today?

### Invite individualism

E.g. If you don't have any story ideas about pirates, maybe there's a different story you'd like to write?



This is the opposite of a compliance-based approach. This step is effectively asking the student 'what could we change about this so that you are able to do it?' For students who become very familiar with this approach, teachers could literally ask that question. To begin with, the teacher can make suggestions based on their insights into the child.

*Some* schoolwork is better than no schoolwork.

*Modified* schoolwork is better than no schoolwork.

A story written about Minecraft is better than no story at all.

Having some students complete different versions of a task is not a crisis, though it might feel uncomfortable or impossible to some teachers. Don't worry- you'll become more familiar with



it as you put it into practice. And you can take comfort in the knowledge that you are strengthening your relationship with your neurodivergent students, and proudly putting their mental wellbeing before compliance.

## ADJUSTING EXPECTATIONS can look like...

Letting student use their deep interest within a task

E.g. Character names in handwriting, game sequences when writing procedures, themed graphs and data collection, choice in subject for creative arts.

Let's validate their big ND strengths. Interest-based work is highly motivating.

Changing expectation from academics to regulation

Dysregulated students are not in the frame of mind to learn. Shifting from academics to regulation is often necessary. Clearly explain the new expectation in a positive way, ensuring the student knows that this new expectation is just as important as the academic one was.

E.g. "It is SO hard trying to work when our body feels really stressed & yuck. Let's leave this work for now and try some things to help your body feel better. Here are some ideas. I can't wait to see which ones work best for you!"



When you adjust the expectation from academics to regulation, you are improving your neurodivergent student's access to their Executive Functioning skills- which they need to meet academic expectations.

Focusing on regulation when your student is dysregulated is essential, and never a waste of time. It's also a critical life skill that all neurodivergent kids need to develop.



## More on EXPECTATIONS

Expectations for Neurodivergent students to demonstrate Neurotypical behaviours, or to suppress ND traits, are INAPPROPRIATE.

They encourage masking, which has been shown to be detrimental to mental wellbeing of ND students

Pretending to be neurotypical all the time takes a ton of mental energy. It really reduces our capacity for learning.

They teach ND students that their brains are inferior, and that neurotypical brains are the best ones.

Think carefully about your expectations.



Teachers should spend time learning from neurodivergent professionals/presenters.

Neurodivergent people are the experts on neurodivergent people.

Unfortunately, many training programs, courses and workshops have been developed *for* neurodivergent people, *without the involvement of neurodivergent people*. Many of these programs are harmful, ableist, and contribute to extremely poor mental health outcomes for neurodivergent folk.

It is important that teachers ensure they are getting their information from the right sources. Information that you learned about Autistic students 5, 10, 15 years ago is likely to be inaccurate.



## ★ Opportunity to EXCEED expectations

Fluctuating capacity means that sometimes our ND kids will be short on mental energy, and sometimes they won't.

When they can't meet the expectation, teachers adjust it so that they CAN meet it.

When they DO meet the expectation, teachers can provide an opportunity to excel. ☺

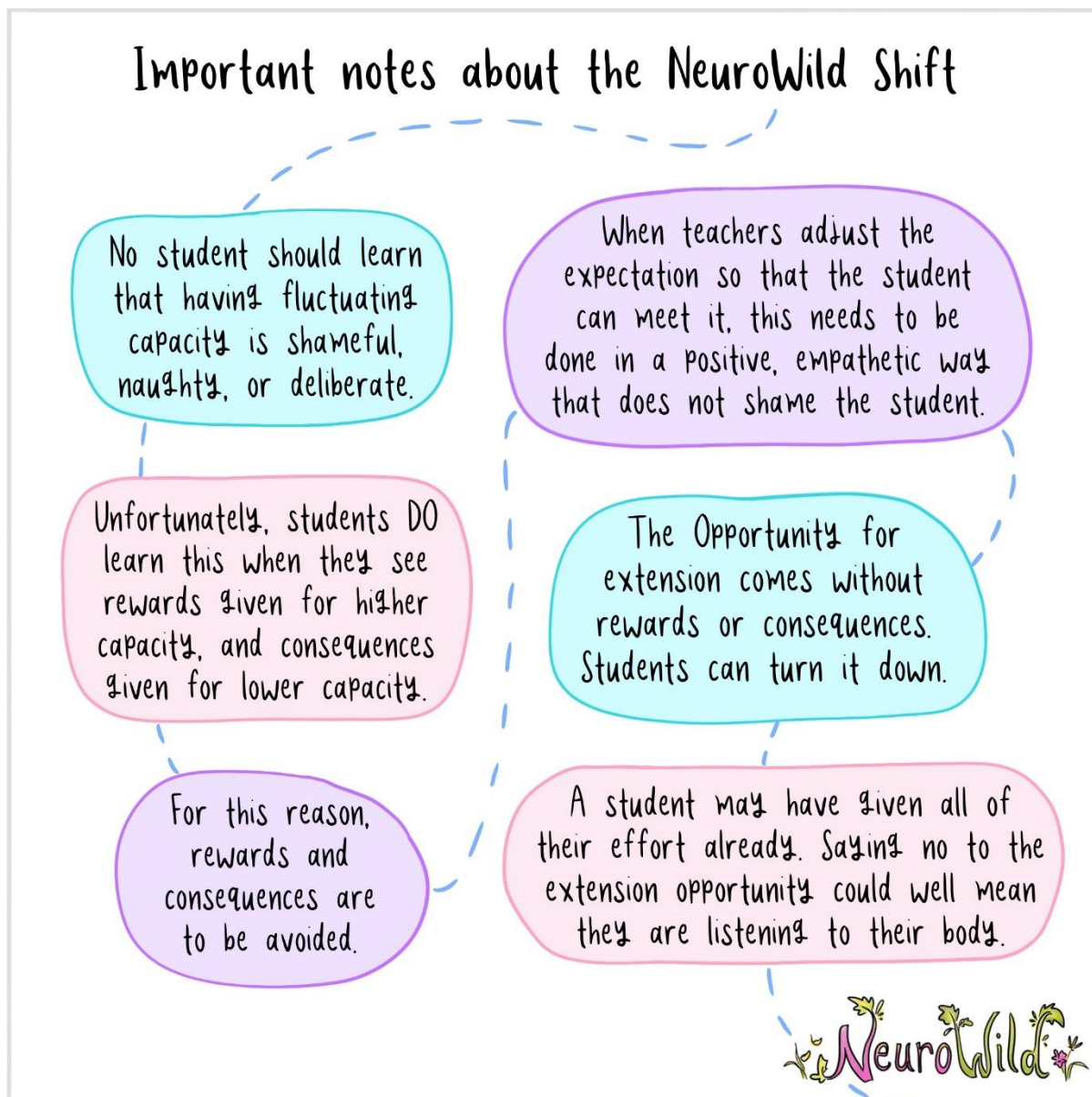


The Opportunity can be provided when you notice a neurodivergent student quickly meeting the expectation.

When neurodivergent students have greater capacity to demonstrate their skills, creativity, language, personality, or interests- we want to give them an opportunity to do so. This means communicating to them that they have already met the expectation (yay!) and would they like to do a little bit more?

Kids can turn it down without consequence. Or they can accept the new challenge. If they attempt it and find it too difficult, there are no consequences.

As kids start to feel safer, supported, and understood in the classroom, I believe teachers will see less stress behaviours, and more expectations being met.



Kids should be actively taught in the classroom and at home that difference is valuable and natural and important to the success of humans. It can't just be something that is said once and then never spoken about again. And it can't just be empty words, either, it has to be actually valued and encouraged in the classroom.

That means not expecting every kid's artwork to be identical. Or every project. Teaching kids that everyone has different learning styles, different strengths and challenges, different social

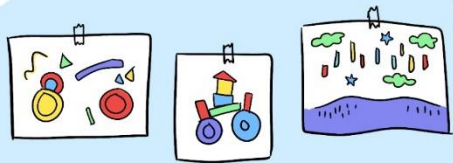
communication styles, different play styles, different ways of expressing emotions and ideas, different bodies, different brains.

It means the teacher is not telling the class that 'good learning' looks like sitting still and eyes on the teacher. It means that 'good behaviour' is not every student completing every task exactly the same, but rather recognising that each student's best may fluctuate, and it doesn't make sense to hold every child to one perceived ideal standard. It's unachievable for many.

Important. Difference is great. Kids need to hear that and see adults who believe it.

Conformity is out. Individual strengths, personality, and expression are in. The wellbeing of our ND kids depends on it.

## In Neurodiversity-affirming Classrooms...



Difference is CELEBRATED.  
Individual Expression  
is encouraged.

Replace this ↘



Dr. Ross Greene  
**KIDS  
DO WELL  
IF THEY  
CAN.**  
...with this ↗



Accommodations +  
modified work are  
always accessible.



Kids are taught that all  
Learning Styles are VALID.

Silence + stillness are not  
Essential conditions for LEARNING.



## BUT I'M WONDERING...

What about kids who refuse to do any work, ever?  
We can't just let them play all day.

These kids need to be looked at holistically. Meaning, the teacher should spend time thinking about sensory processing systems, emotional processing systems, executive functioning skills, regulation, learning styles, home lives, wellbeing, trauma history.

These kids will need significant modifications to tasks, including interest-lead activities, play-based learning, and accommodations. School work has likely felt inaccessible to these kids. We need to make it accessible and engaging.

We need to remember that these kids would do well if they could. Something (or likely MANY things) is getting in the way.



So these kids will need more of a plan, for sure. Start with their interests and build some learning outcomes into that. Give them success, build safety, build connection.

Give them expectations that they can meet. Provide opportunities for them to exceed the expectations if they choose to.

The priority for students who do not seem to engage with 'schoolwork' is to give them things that they will engage with. Start there.

Don't forget, as well, that kids learn through play. Playing is not wasted time.



## BUT I'M WONDERING...

What about kids who are having meltdowns all the time?  
They'll just use that to get out of doing anything.

Meltdown occurs when a neurodivergent child is in extreme distress. It signals significant unmet needs, and it is outside the child's control. A child is not using meltdowns to manipulate teachers into getting what they want. Meltdowns are traumatic and extremely distressing for neurodivergent kids. Basically, that is not a naughty child, but rather a child in crisis.

Supports need to be put in place so that this child's needs are being met. They can't learn until they feel safe and supported. Rebuilding a sense of safety is not likely to be quick, especially if they have learned for years that school is unsafe and stressful.

But it's essential for the wellbeing of that student.



Do not make the mistake of assuming that meltdowns are 'just something that happens' with autistic kids. They do happen, but they don't have to happen. There are a lot of things that we can do to prevent them from happening. An Autistic kid having meltdowns all the time is a massive red flag that they are not ok.

Meltdowns are caused by significant unmet needs. Our job is to figure out a kid's needs and do our best to meet them.

Many adults (teachers, parents, professionals) will tell me 'I *am* doing my best to meet their needs but their behaviour is getting worse, they're getting so hard, I can't handle it.'



That makes me wonder about what approaches are being tried, what strategies, what is the understanding behind all this. If the strategies and programs have come from non-autistic organisations or trainers, they could very well be escalating the challenges, because they are often based on incorrect and harmful theories, stigmas, outcomes, and ableist research. They might look like behaviour modification, exposure programs, social skills training- these types of programs are likely to make things a whole lot worse. Because they don't focus on the child's needs and preferences. They bend and break the child so that they better fit with the adult's needs and preferences.

What is actually going to help? Meeting the kid's needs.

## BUT I'M WONDERING...

About meeting curriculum requirements. Every kid needs to get a certain amount of things ticked off.

Neurodivergent students have the right to access the curriculum in a way that is suitable and compatible with their unique learning style. They have the right to reasonable modifications and accommodations, and the right to feel safe and valued in the classroom.

Constantly setting expectations that neurodivergent students cannot meet is harmful to their learning, self-esteem, and mental wellbeing.

AND when neurodivergent students feel safe, supported, and happy, they are better able to listen, learn, and meet expectations. Focusing on safety and connection in the short term will set a student up for better success in the long term.



Completing modified work is better than completing no work. Completing less sentences is better than completing no sentences. Making a graph about Minecraft weapons is better than making no graph at all.

Our kids do well if they can (Dr Ross Greene).

Everyone wants our kids to learn at school. For that to happen, they have to **be at school**. For them to be there, consistently, happily, willingly, they need to feel safe, valued, and supported there.



Trying your best to meet an adjusted expectation and feeling proud is better than trying your best but not meeting an inflexible expectation and feeling ashamed.



This image will not reflect every neurodivergent student's school experience. However it is far too common.

## Let's sum it up...

Being a teacher is extremely hard work. You are often overworked, underappreciated, and underpaid. Many of you are trying hard to make changes to benefit neurodivergent kids, and all of the neurodivergent adults in the world are thanking you.

It's impossible to know exactly what is going on with each student in your class at all times. I don't expect you to know what complex collection of challenges my neurodivergent kid is experiencing in your classroom at any given moment.

The NeuroWild Shift is an approach that you can use with any neurodivergent student. You don't have to know exactly what is going on with them in the moment (you'll obviously think about that later), but you can be sure that your response is going to preserve the wellbeing of that student. You are looking after their mental health and self-image first and foremost. You are teaching them that you understand their fluctuating capacity, and you are modelling how adjustments and accommodations can be made. You are focusing on their strengths and encouraging them to listen to their body. In short, you are giving them gold.

And yes, academics. Yes, curriculum. I do know.

But remember that our neurodivergent kids cannot access their executive functioning skills when they are dysregulated or out of mental energy. So they can't access the curriculum effectively. They can't process it well, so they can't learn it well. They can't do it when they don't feel safe.

We need to start at the start – safety, regulation, and respecting fluctuating capacity.

The NeuroWild Shift does that.

I hope it's useful to you.

Thanks for working with me to make positive change for our neurodivergent kids at school.

Em from NeuroWild



Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
 Staff Member \_\_\_\_\_

# KIDS DO WELL IF THEY CAN

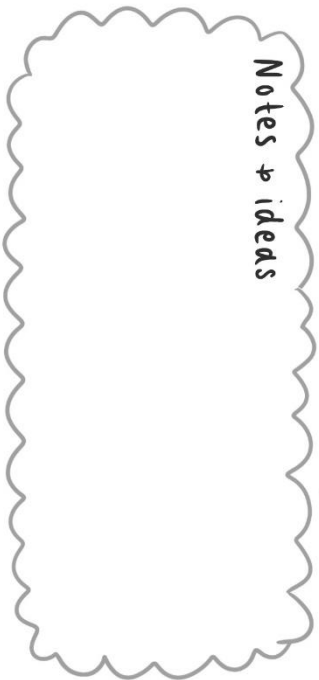
- Dr Ross Greene -

What happened? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Executive Functioning  
 skills requiring support:

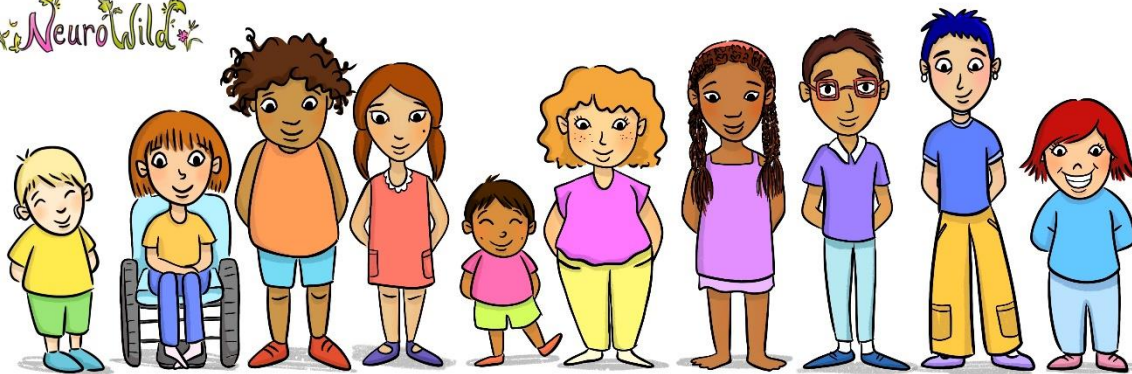
Supports & Strategies  
 to put in place:



<input type="checkbox"/> Impulsivity	
<input type="checkbox"/> Problem Solving	
<input type="checkbox"/> Following instructions	
<input type="checkbox"/> Remembering rules	
<input type="checkbox"/> Perspective-taking	
<input type="checkbox"/> Predicting	
<input type="checkbox"/> Logic & reasoning	
<input type="checkbox"/> Managing emotions	
<input type="checkbox"/> Managing conflict	
<input type="checkbox"/> Transitions	

- Model
- Modify
- Scaffold
- Simplify
- Flexible Expectations
- Multi-modal
- Wellbeing





# BEAUTY in DIVERSITY

ALL BRAINS, ALL BODIES,  
ALL HUMANS.





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