

NEURODIVERSITY-AFFIRMING CLASSROOMS ARE FAB!

Foster belonging

Accommodate varied sensory needs and processing styles

Believe *all* brains and bodies are good and deserve our understanding

FOSTER BELONGING

1. **Include each unique child.** Consider how to make sure every child feels seen and is included in the classroom space; consider strengths and special interests.
2. **Prioritize representation.** Consider the representation in your classroom library, any media used, books and resources. Is there neurodivergence and disability representation?
3. **Talk about neurodiversity with students.** Students notice differences; we must provide a framework for understanding different brains as a positive part of being in a diverse classroom.
4. **Collaborate with caregivers.** Proactively partner with families when challenges arise. Lead with curiosity to ensure conversations focus on supporting the student's rather than shame or punishment.

ACCOMMODATE VARIED SENSORY NEEDS

1. **Provide flexible seating options.** Include chairs, standing desks, wobble stools, floor cushions, and quiet corners and normalize their use.
2. **Use soft, adjustable lighting.** Offer natural light, lamps, and dimmable lighting instead of harsh fluorescent lights.
3. **Reduce visual clutter.** Sometimes less is more; consider having fewer materials on the walls and shelves.
4. **Designate quiet spaces.** Have a low-stimulation area where students can self-regulate and take breaks and normalize its use.
5. **Reduce auditory overload.** Be mindful of noises like loud fans, clocks, etc. Provide noise-canceling headphones, soft rugs, and sound-absorbing materials to minimize background noise.
6. **Offer sensory regulating tools and talk about their use!** Include weighted lap pads and fidget toys for sensory regulation.
7. **Allow movement.** Provide fidget tools, standing desks, and opportunities for movement breaks.

ACCOMMODATE VARIED PROCESSING STYLES

1. **Provide a predictable schedule and routine.** Create a visual schedule for the day and also mini “schedules”/routines during the day, such as a routine for arrival, transitions, snack, etc.
2. **Preview changes in the schedule or routine.** Verbally and visually explain anything that may be unexpected before the event; provide the who, what, where, when, why and consider making a social story.
3. **Make social stories for challenging sensory or processing experiences.** These outline what will happen and the options for support and accommodation; the goal is to empower not control.
4. **Incorporate visual supports.** Use visual schedules, task lists, and picture cues to aid understanding and independence.
5. **Keep an organized and predictable classroom layout.** Maintain clear pathways, boundaries, and dedicated spaces.
6. **Provide and accept multiple ways to engage.** Create varied learning stations to accommodate different needs and encourage students’ varied interactions.

BELIEVE THAT ALL BRAINS AND BODIES ARE GOOD AND DESERVE OUR UNDERSTANDING

1. **Validate all styles of learning** by providing multiple ways of taking in information.
2. **Do not prioritize one way of learning or listening.** Check your implicit messages; the goal should not be neurotypical ways of being.
3. **Look below the surface of the behavior iceberg.** When behaviors present, consider what the behavior may be communicating.
4. **Believe “Kids do well when they can”** (Dr. Ross Greene). When a child is struggling, do not assume they are doing it on purpose.
5. **Do not use reward or punishment systems** even for “positive reinforcement.”
6. **Empathize.** Tell and show your students you care and model understanding, especially when they’re having a tough time.
7. **Extend this belief to yourself.** All educators and caregivers also deserve understanding and empathy! Recognize your own challenges with curiosity and be gentle with yourself as you do this vital work.

REMEMBER YOU ARE FAB! (IN SO MANY WAYS)

