

# NEURODIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE







Supporting neurodivergent individuals to thrive

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# WORKSHOP EXPECTATIONS

Before we begin, please consider the following virtual meeting norms:

-  Be **present**, engaged, and practice active listening.
-  **Join** the discussion: this is a **brave** space with opportunities for you to share and ask questions.
-  Please remain on **mute when you're not speaking**.
-  Assume **positive intentions** and be open to new ideas.



# ABOUT ME

- ◆ Liza Mednikov Elish (she/her)
- ◆ HR Training & Compliance Specialist
- ◆ Started at WVMCCD in November, 2023
- ◆ Former Math Teacher
- ◆ UC Santa Cruz Alum:
  - Bachelors in Mathematics
  - Masters in Education
- ◆ Neurodivergent!

# LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of training, you should know:

- What is neurodiversity and why is it important?
- The advantages of supporting neurodivergent members of your team.
- Creating a sense of inclusion and belonging for neurodivergent employees



# EXERCISE: WHAT DO YOU SEE?

Get some paper and a writing utensil.

On your paper, write down what you see.



# EXERCISE: FILL-IN THE BLANK

On your paper, write down the first word that comes to mind to complete the phrase.

HOME \_\_\_\_\_

# QUESTIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS

- Have you learned about neurodiversity before?  
What do you already know?
- What would you like to gain from this workshop?



Video link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8YHom6Xs0oQ&t=1s>



# IMPORTANT KEY TERMS

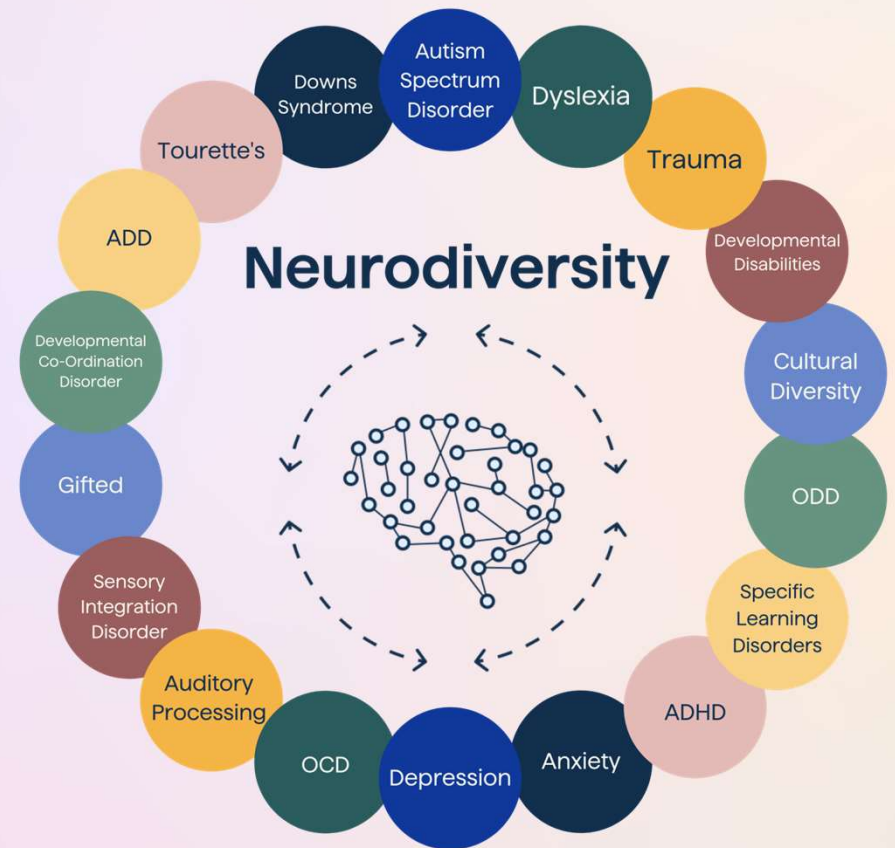
Someone who is **neurodivergent** has a mind that functions in ways which diverge significantly from the societal standards of 'typical'.

A **neurominority** group, such as people with ADHD, share a similar form of innate neurodivergence.



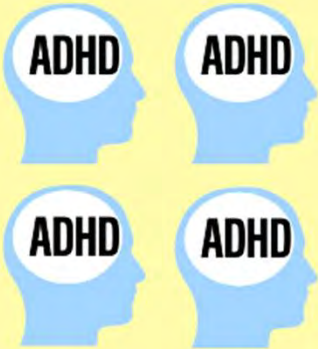


People who are **not** neurodivergent are called '**neurotypical**'.

Neurodivergence is not technically a disability; not all presentations of neurodivergence are a disability, nor do all neurodivergent people consider themselves to have a disability.

However, many people who are neurodivergent do have a **protected disability**.



# USING CORRECT TERMINOLOGY

 <p>Each of these people are <b>NEURODIVERGENT</b></p>	 <p>This person is <b>NEUROTYPICAL</b></p>	 <p>These people are NEURODIVERGENT but the group itself is <b>NOT NEURODIVERSE</b></p>
 <p>This is a <b>NEURODIVERSE</b> group</p>	 <p>This person is <b>MULTIPLY NEURODIVERGENT</b></p>	<p>Only a group can be <b>NEURODIVERSE</b> An individual can not</p>

# ABLEISM

“Ableism is the discrimination of and social prejudice against people with disabilities based on the belief that typical abilities are superior. At its heart, ableism is rooted in the assumption that disabled people require ‘fixing’ and defines people by their disability.” (accessliving.org)

## Common Examples of Ableism

- Acting as if People with Disabilities need to be “saved”
- Assuming that People with Disabilities are unable to do something
- Making jokes about a person’s differences
- Not speaking directly to the Disabled Person, or using infantilizing language
- Saying that someone doesn’t look/ seem to have a disability, or questioning their use of accommodations
- Asking invasive medical questions or questioning the validity of someone’s diagnosis
- Appropriating terms like “OCD” or “ADHD”, when you really mean something else
- Comparing people’s disabilities as being more, or less, “severe”
- Institutional or structural aspects that are inaccessible; i.e., building a new auditorium that does not allow access to wheelchair users

# NEURO- INCLUSIVITY

Neuro-inclusivity means embracing neurodiversity and ensuring that all people and neurotypes are included.

Supporting and implementing inclusive and accessible practices, which are necessary for some, and beneficial to all.



Being mindful of neurological differences makes more effective communication for all.



Seek to understand, and respect everyone's differences.



Encourages everyone to look for one's strengths rather than deficits



Expands our understanding of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Accessibility, and Belonging



# TO SUPPORT NEUROINCLUSIVITY IN THE WORKPLACE:

You first need to get rid of bias by changing attitudes and correcting misconceptions.

There are many stereotypes regarding neurodivergent people, and without tackling them, you may lose out on fantastic opportunities in the workplace and in the classroom.

Having a conscious and active approach to discussing neurodiversity can also make EVERYONE feel more comfortable and understand each other.

You should also consider that neurodivergent people may have specific requirements or accommodations that will help them get equitable access and thrive.

# RESPECTING DIFFERENCES, AVOIDING STEREOTYPES

It's important to note that no two people are alike.

Often, an entire neurodivergent demographic is **inaccurately stereotyped**, with generalizations made across the whole group;

For example, that Autistic people do not enjoy any social interaction, or that people with ADHD cannot focus.



*"If you've met one autistic person, you've met one autistic person."*

POPULAR SAYING IN THE AUTISTIC COMMUNITY

# USE MINDFUL LANGUAGE

Below are some common phrases that can be adjusted to be more inclusive of Autistic individuals. These phrases are preferred by many in the Autistic community, but **each Autistic individual is different and may prefer something else**. As with anyone, asking an Autistic person their preferences should take priority. Language is always evolving; stay updated with research and the Autistic communities!

INSTEAD OF...	TRY THIS...
Person with Autism (person-first)*	Autistic person (identity-first)*
Person with a Disability (person-first)*	Disabled person (identity-first)*
Aspergers*	Autistic/ On the Autism Spectrum*
Autism symptoms	Autistic traits/ characteristics/ features
Normal	Neurotypical, non-autistic (or allistic)
Differently-abled, different ability	Disabled, disability
Cure	Supports/ accommodations
Non-verbal	Non-speaking
High/Low functioning	(Use specific support needs)
Autism as a “puzzle”	Autism as a part of neurodiversity (people interact and experience the world differently)
Suffers from autism	Impact/effect of autism
Deficit	Difference
Mental illness (Autism is not a mental illness)	Condition/ Disability

## What people see

restlessness

## What people **don't** see

difficulty planning  
and organizing

difficulty prioritizing

difficulty initializing tasks  
and maintaining effort

anxiety      disorganization

mood swings

hyperfixations  
and hyperfocus

difficulty maintaining  
relationships and jobs

poor working memory

difficulty regulating emotions



# THE ADHD STRENGTHS ICEBERG

WHAT PEOPLE  
THINK ADHDERS  
ARE GOOD AT:

talking  
fast

creativity

WHAT ADHDERS  
ARE ACTUALLY  
GOOD AT:

literally anything  
they find  
interesting

problem  
solving

working  
under  
pressure

learning

empathy

brainstorming

changing  
the world

crisis  
situations

risk-taking

getting a lot  
done in a short  
amount of time

unique  
intuition

forgiveness

competitive  
challenges

optimism

entrepreneurship

mastering  
new hobbies

creating  
something  
beautiful

tackling new  
challenges

sense of  
humor

authenticity

imagination

hyperfocus

Embracing Cognitive Diversity

The Hidden Strengths of

# DYSLEXIA

## AT A GLANCE

Dr. Megan Anna Neff

### Creative Thinking

Dyslexics often excel in thinking outside the box & coming up with innovative solutions due to their unique thought processes.



### 3 Dimensional + Visual Thinking



Dyslexics often have strong visual-spatial skills, including 3-dimensional thinking, which can be beneficial in fields like art, design, & architecture

### Empathy

Many dyslexics possess strong interpersonal skills & empathy, as they often need to navigate challenges in communication and understanding



### Strong Memory Skills



Many people with dyslexia have excellent long-term memory, particularly when it comes to experiences & visual information

### Narrative Reasoning

Dyslexics excel in narrative reasoning, leveraging memory for efficient learning, while showcasing strong reasoning skills in simplification, analysis, decision-making, & strategic visioning



Neurodivergent  
insights  
Dr. Megan Anna Neff

**DO YOU HAVE ANYTHING  
YOU WANT TO ADD?**

# HOW NEURODIVERGENCE \*MIGHT\* PRESENT IN THE WORKPLACE

- Preference or a need for certain kinds of communication over others, including processing difficulties
- Preference for routine, structure, and clear expectations that are met with regular and clear feedback
- Different levels of comfort with group work or group social settings
- Sensitivities to lights, sounds, smells, and other sensory input
- Trouble receiving any form of criticism (might result in feeling shut down and isolated)
- Difficulty with time management, planning, and project deadlines
- Taking more time to transition (Between projects, before/after meetings, etc.)
- Trouble adjusting to unexpected changes
- Feeling like an outsider because of trouble with social engagement
- Impostor syndrome



# ADVANTAGES OF NEURODIVERGENT EMPLOYEES

- Heightened creativity and unique problem-solving capabilities
- Periods of hyperfocus that allow for extended periods of high-quality work
- Loyalty, honesty, and integrity
- Attention to detail
- Impressive levels of expertise
- Tenacity and resilience
- Accepting of peoples' differences
- Sense of wonderment and strong desire for new knowledge
- Empathetic and understanding
- Unique perspectives that can help people/ organizations get “unstuck” when they’ve been doing something one way for a long time
- Extremely hard workers with strong resiliency
- Help anticipate obstacles, remain cautious, and stay organized
- Neurodivergent staff are valuable resources for Neurodivergent students and other ND staff

# WELL-KNOWN NEURODIVERGENT INDIVIDUALS



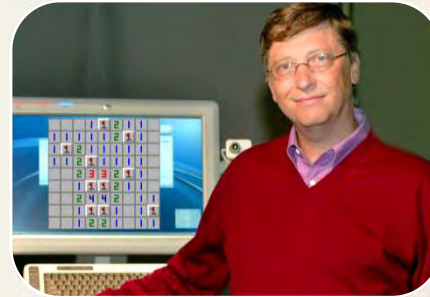
Temple Grandin  
Autism

Animal Behaviorist, Autism Activist



Simone Biles  
ADHD

American Gymnast, Olympic Champion



Bill Gates  
ADHD, Dyslexia

Microsoft Co-Founder and Former CEO



Satoshi Tajiri  
Autism

Pokémon creator, Video Game designer



Salma Hayek  
Dyslexia

Actor, Film Producer



Billie Eilish  
Tourette's Syndrome

Singer, Songwriter



Greta Thunberg  
Autism

Environmental Activist



Amanda Gorman  
Auditory Processing Disorder

National Youth Poet Laureate, Author

# UTILIZING NEURODIVERGENT TALENT

- Many companies and organizations around the world that launched neurodiversity initiatives have shown a tremendous positive impact.
- Microsoft, Ford, IBM, Goldman Sachs, JPMorgan Chase, SAP, and Hewlett Packard Enterprise have all launched neurodiversity initiatives.
- SAP is already experiencing the benefits of their program: increased employee engagement and productivity, improvements in product quality, and an increase in company-wide innovations.
- Australia's Department of Human Services (DHS) neurodiverse software-testing teams were proven to be 30% more productive than their counterparts.
- According to executive director and head of JP Morgan's 'Autism at Work' program, James Mahoney, "Our autistic employees achieve, on average, 48% to 140% more work than their typical colleagues, depending on the roles."
- Not only can neurodivergent people perform as well as neurotypicals – they bring significant and valuable attributes to the workplace.

**STRETCH BREAK!**



# SIMPLE YET EFFECTIVE

## **Strategies:**

1. Provide clear expectations and reminders
2. Communicate clearly
3. Ensure the work environment is well-structured
4. Regularly review performance and give positive reinforcement for good work
5. Provide reassurance in stressful situations and plan for changes
6. Assistive Technology

## **Possible Accommodation ideas:**

1. Change to the workplace (i.e., accessible car park spaces, changing overhead lighting)
2. Changes to (i.e., flexible working, changing employee's working patterns, hybrid, distributing someone's breaks evenly throughout the day)
3. Finding a different way of doing something (i.e., giving more time to complete interview tasks)
4. Providing (i.e., providing documents in an accessible format, ergonomic equipment, assistive tech and software, providing captions, giving 1-on-1 support, like helping someone prioritize their work)

To initiate the accommodation process, please contact

# EASY AND EFFECTIVE NEURO-INCLUSIVE PRACTICES TO SUPPORT NEURODIVERGENT PEOPLE



Changing and replacing things that may cause sensory challenges



Focusing on various options for communicating information



**Providing opportunities to learn and communicate in preferred ways**

How do you want to work on this project? We could meet or have an email thread.

It would be easier for me to speak via email please.

Not a problem, let's do that.



# EXAMPLE #1

Michael\*, who has ADHD, is in a management position and has been successful in his role for quite some time. When a new supervisor comes on board, the standards for written communication are more strictly enforced. Michael has difficulty attending to detail when he writes, including spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors in his written communications that go out to employees and business partners.

What are some ideas to support this employee?

Michael\* received speech recognition software that allowed him to dictate whatever he needed to write. A playback feature allows him an added layer of oversight. He also requested writing/editing software that he can plug his written materials into so they will be checked over for spelling, grammar, and punctuation an additional time.

## EXAMPLE #2

Emily\* is a Faculty member on the Autism Spectrum. She has difficulty keeping daily office hours, which are required for her position, and experienced anxiety because the timing of students' consultations was unpredictable. She also experiences anxiety when evaluation observations are conducted without providing advance notice.

What are some ideas to support this employee to fulfill her duties?

Emily\* can request to **modify her office hour schedule** as an accommodation. For example, she could reduce the number of days she has office hours but have longer office hours on those days. Another suggestion is adjusting the method by which students obtain appointments, asking students to **schedule at least one day in advance** when possible, or allow Emily to conduct consultations electronically, by phone, or by instant messenger. Additionally, Emily can request for all observations to be scheduled in advance, as to ensure **predictability**.



*"As a CEO, I can set the tone  
for a supportive culture."*



*"As a co-worker, I  
can listen and be a  
source of support  
to my colleagues."*

*"As a manager, I can  
offer assistance and  
accommodations."*



*"As a person with a mental health  
condition, I can ask for what I  
need to perform my best."*



## Mental Health at Work What Can I Do?

We all have a role to play in promoting  
a mental health-friendly workplace.

Find tips, tools and more at [WhatCanYouDoCampaign.org](https://WhatCanYouDoCampaign.org)



OFFICE OF DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT POLICY  
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

What can  
**YOU** do?  
THE CAMPAIGN FOR  
DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT



# QUESTIONS FOR THE AUDIENCE



What are your key takeaways from today's training?



How are you going to put this knowledge to practice?



Is there anything that piqued your interest that you will seek to learn more?



What questions do you have for me?

# THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING THIS LEARNING LAB

Feel free to send in any questions to  
[liza.elish@wvm.edu](mailto:liza.elish@wvm.edu)