

NEURODIVERGENCE



CREATING INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTS

Neurodivergent rangatahi may experience emotions, communication & stress differently. These differences are not problems to fix but strengths that can flourish with understanding and support. The language we use matters: focusing on strengths, curiosity, and flexibility helps young people build a positive identity and thrive in a world often designed with neurotypical people in mind.

INTEROCEPTION

It can be harder for neurodivergent young people to notice and interpret internal body signals such as hunger, thirst, temperature, and emotions.

TIP: Schedule breaks, use concrete language, and simple body-based scales.

INTEREST-BASED NERVOUS SYSTEM

Essential activities are achievable when they become novel, interesting, challenging, and/or urgent.

TIP: Use their interests as a basis for learning.

COMMUNICATION

Remember the double empathy problem - be aware of their communication styles to avoid misunderstandings. Learn what their listening looks like (ie. movement, no eye contact). Discover preferences and needs.

TIP: Allow for processing time and pace. Give visual, written, and structured verbal communication. Behaviour is a form of communication.

ENVIRONMENT

Adjust the environment not the young person. Be aware of sensory sensitivities that may affect mood and behaviour - reduce light, noise, sensory demands where possible.

TIP: Make sensory toolkits available and portable - think about sight, sound, texture, taste, pressure. Offer low-sensory space when over-stimulated.

TASKS & ACTIVITIES

Engage an interest-based nervous system, break tasks down into achievable chunks, reduce load on working memory, time management.

TIP: Useful apps include Inflow, Todoist, ChatGPT, Joon, TaskTimer, Pomodoro.

SIGNS OF A STRUGGLE

- Notice changes in body language, behaviour, interests, engagement and participation.
- Help the young person to identify signs they might be overwhelmed and make a reset plan to regulate.
- Seek professional help if situation escalates.

