

The Whistle Stop



Issue 39



What is Neurodiversity?

There is natural variation in how people's brains work and how people experience, understand and interact with the world. This means there are natural differences in the way people learn and communicate.

Most children's brains develop in ways that are seen as typical for their age and stage. These children can be described as **neurotypical**.

About 1 in 5-6 children have variations in their brain development. These variations include those seen in ADHD, autism and dyslexia. These children can be described as **neurodivergent**.¹

Embracing neurodiversity

Embracing neurodiversity is about **accepting, including, celebrating and supporting neurodivergent children**. Their differences are part of natural variation and don't need to be treated or changed.

This involves:

- acknowledging that some children might do things differently
- adjusting tasks and activities so that all children can participate (e.g., allowing them to move rather than sit still at story time)
- making the most of every child's skills, especially the skills they're proud of
- not expecting children to change behaviour like stimming (e.g., hand flapping, rocking, spinning), which can be regulating
- making sure that schools, clubs, and organizations include and support neurodivergent children.¹

¹Quoted or adapted from <https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/a-z-health-reference/neurodiversity-neurodivergence-guide-for-families>



About Language Express

Language Express provides free speech and language assessment and therapy services for children from birth to Junior Kindergarten in Lanark, Leeds, and Grenville counties. If you have concerns about your child's speech and language, don't wait and see! We can help your child and provide useful ideas for you and your child's caregivers or teachers.

When To Get Help:

- If your child is not meeting all of the communication milestones for their age.
- If your child is stuttering.
- If your child's play or social interaction seems different from other children the same age.
- If your child's voice doesn't sound right.
- If your child has a diagnosis such as hearing loss, Autism Spectrum Disorder, or developmental delay.

Language Express accepts referrals for children from birth until Sept. 1 of the year they turn 4.

Visit our [milestones page](#) or complete the Language Express [Communication Checkup](#) to see if your child's development is on track and to make a referral. You can also call us for more information or to make a referral.

1-888-503-8885



Ways to support the neurodivergent children in your life:

All play is okay!



Some children might play differently than other children (e.g., lining up toys, spinning the wheels on a car) - this is okay! If a child is finding joy in their play, we can join in, imitate them, and talk about what we're doing.

Honour all forms of communication



There are many ways to communicate. We can respond to any way a child sends messages, including using gestures, sounds, pictures, pulling you toward something, and using words.

Encourage self-advocacy



Encourage children to share their likes, dislikes and needs. Let them make choices (e.g., which shirt they want to wear, which playground equipment to play on). Listen when a child is saying 'stop' through their body language, facial expressions, or words.

Consider sensory needs and preferences



Some children need different amounts/types of sensory input to feel grounded and regulated. They may be very sensitive to sensory input (e.g., loud noises, textures of clothes and food, fluorescent lights) or need extra sensory input (e.g., lots of movement, tight hugs, bright and noisy toys) in order to participate fully in their day.

Consider seeking support



Wondering whether your child might be neurodivergent? Talk to their physician about a referral for a Developmental Assessment. You can also reach out to your local Smart Start Hub* for help connecting to available services.

For speech and language support, families can self-refer to Language Express at www.language-express.ca or by calling 1-888-503-8885.

*<http://www.kidsinclusive.ca/smartstart-hub>

*www.cheo.on.ca/en/clinics-services-programs/access-team.aspx



Let's Read About It!

All children can learn about neurodiversity to help them understand themselves and their peers. Check out some of these books:

About Neurodiversity:

Some Brains: A Book Celebrating Neurodiversity – by Nelly Thomas

The Brain Forest – by Sandhya Menon

About Autism: My Brother Otto – by Meg Raby

About ADHD: My Whirling, Twirling Motor – by Merriam Sarcia Saunders

For adults:

Start Here: A Guide for Parents of Autistic Kids – by Autistic Self-Advocacy Network

Uniquely Human: A Different Way of Seeing Autism – Dr. Barry M. Prizant

For more resources about neurodiversity (including podcasts, books, websites, and social media), check out our website:

<https://healthunit.org/health-information/language-express/information-for-parents/>

