

To: All Providers
From: PerformCare
Date: October 22, 2024
Subject: 2024 Q4 #1 DEI Provider Memo Series: Supporting Neurodivergent Individuals

PerformCare's 2024 4th quarter Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Provider Memo focuses on how words matter for people who are Neurodivergent.



Words Matter: Supporting Neurodivergent Individuals

Neurodivergence is a non-medical term that describes the diversity or variation of peoples' cognitive functioning. The term was developed to describe people using words other than "normal" and "abnormal" or "typical" and "atypical." It acknowledges that everyone has a unique brain and possesses different skills, abilities, and needs. Neuro-differences are a social category like ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, or ability. Some examples are Autism, Dyslexia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity, Tourette's Syndrome, Down Syndrome, Intellectual Disability, and gifted-level intellect.

Some strengths of neurodivergent individuals may include a strong memory, good problem-solving skills, being able to mentally picture 3D objects, the ability to solve complex mathematical calculations in one's head, creativity and generation of ideas, and a high level of interpersonal awareness and social understanding. Some individuals with neurodiversity may struggle due to systems and processes that do not allow them the opportunity to display their strengths or that create new or more intense challenges. Accommodations can help individuals overcome struggles giving them a tool or way to succeed.

'Intellectual Disability' is terminology used when a person has certain limitations in their intellectual functioning and in adaptive skills, such as communicating, taking care of themselves, and mobility. These limitations cause a person to learn and develop at a slower rate than people who do not have an intellectual disability.



Below are some suggestions for supporting neurodivergent individuals and individuals with an intellectual disability:

Listen: Neurodiverse individuals may feel excluded or that their voice is not as valued as others. Give them time to be heard and let them know you value their thoughts and opinions in their preferred method of communications.

Explore preferred communication methods: An expansion of communication methods has emerged from individuals for whom spoken communication is not preferred or effective. These individuals may want to use new technologies, such as Picture Exchange Communication Systems (PECS), Augmentative and Alternative Communication Devices (AAC) or Speech Generating Devices (SGD) or may be more comfortable communicating via instant messaging/text messaging.

Look beyond behaviors: There can be a major disconnect between the mind/body and a person's actions, especially when overwhelmed or upset. When behaviors seem extreme remind yourself that actions do not always reflect intention.

Avoid terms that compare to 'norms': Terms like 'high functioning' and 'low functioning' are scientifically imprecise, may be demeaning and make neurotypical behavior the standard, rather than accepting the broad differences among people. If you need to describe a difference, talk about it in specific terms that actually help raise awareness to the individual's strengths and needs.

Challenge assumptions about capabilities and intelligence based on diagnoses or appearances; take the time to learn each person's unique abilities and educate others when you hear things that reinforce stereotypes and stigmatization.

Respect individual preferences: Each person is their own expert on what works for them. One way we can show respect for neurodiversity is to make an effort to follow through with requests to adjust how we interact and communicate with others.

There is room in this world to appreciate and celebrate all individuals for who they are, and doing so makes the world a better place for all of us.

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