

# Promoting inclusion for **Neurodiverse** young people



## What is neurodiversity? Who is neurodivergent?

The term neurodiversity encompasses every human being and highlights the inherent variety of ways in which people think, feel, and act. The term "neurodivergent" refers to individuals whose neurology and behaviour deviate from what is considered 'typical' - if there even is such a thing as typical or 'normal' in this regard.

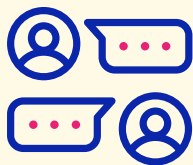
A neurodivergent person may have a condition such as Autism, ADHD, Dyslexia, or Dyspraxia. Some individuals will exhibit characteristics of multiple conditions, and many will, for a variety of reasons, remain undiagnosed. As well as this, any two individuals with the same diagnostic label may present in entirely

different ways - everyone's neurodivergence manifests uniquely. This is why a traits based approach to supporting neurodivergence is more effective than a labels based approach - **asking** the young person what their preference is.

Sport offers a unique opportunity for neurodivergent children helping them to understand their strengths and challenges within a safe and structured environment that aligns with how their brains work. By gaining insight into how their brain functions, children can improve their engagement and performance in both sport and other areas of life, learning valuable, transferable life skills.

# Top Tips for Making Events Inclusive to Neurodivergent Individuals.

## What can we do to help?



### 1. Understand Individual Needs

Send a questionnaire to teachers to ascertain what would help their students access activities. If possible, ask the students themselves about their sensory needs, communication preferences and accommodations. A young person may also find orientation or navigating the environment a challenge, as well as the possibility of feeling anxiety related to social interactions. Follow up with a call if needed.

Be mindful that some children may not be aware that they are neurodivergent, while others may be reluctant to disclose their status. Try to create an opportunity for children to safely and comfortably disclose their neurodivergence and share their specific support needs.



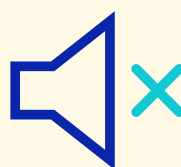
### 2. Pre-Event Familiarisation

Try to arrange a 'meet and greet' session for neurodivergent students to visit the venue, meet staff, and explore activity areas before the event. When in-person venue visits are impractical, offering telephone or virtual tours via platforms such as Zoom can be a helpful alternative. Alternatively, create a video showcasing the areas in advance and the key staff delivering the event on the day so individuals know who to look out for. Additionally, a walk round at the beginning of the event can help this.



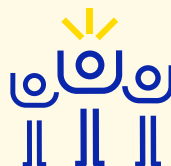
### 3. Visual Schedules

Make a poster with pictures of each activity in the order they are delivered (e.g. race, break, lunch) using icons (widgets) for clarity. If possible, provide schools with digital copies in advance to share with caregivers and parents before the event.



### 4. Quiet Zones

Ensure the venue has a quiet room available and this is clearly marked on maps. Make sure the room is equipped with suitable items such as bean bags, noise cancelling headphones and fidget toys. Also encourage schools to bring familiar items as these may suit the young person better.



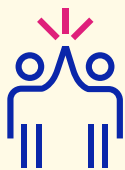
### 5. Flexible Participation Options

In an event, can you enable the neurodiverse students to choose their role? For example, they could participate, or be the timekeeper or cheerleader from the sidelines. Pacing can be key – is there a need to move around the stations or can individuals go at their own pace? Remember, success is different for all participants. For example, if a pupil has never engaged in an activity with someone new before and they play with a ball and a leader for five minutes then this would be seen as a huge achievement and must be recognised.



## 6. Clear Instructions

Utilise a whiteboard with illustrations or visual demonstrations to explain rules, covering teamwork, passing and goal scoring. Checking for understanding in small groups or one-to-one can be useful here to avoid students being overwhelmed.



## 7. Buddy System

Pair neurodiverse students with buddies who understand their needs, to help navigate activities, simplify rules, and provide companionship.

If possible, look to include a neurodiversity-informed adult to the organising team. Having a designated neurodivergent liaison or a point of contact available for children, buddies, mentors, coaches or parents could provide additional support, guidance and signposting as needed.



## 8. Training for Staff and Volunteers

Organise a training session for staff and volunteers on neurodiverse traits and support strategies, including real-life scenarios practice for assisting overwhelmed students. Event staff should be guided by school staff on what is best for their students.



## 9. Post-Event Reflection

Build in time within your schedule to reflect on the event as this can be challenging for neurodiverse students – they can complete this individually or as a group but supporting them to recognise their achievements here is key for their return. Take the time to reflect with members of staff too on what went well and why and if they have any suggestions to help improve future events.



## 10. Consistency in Approach.

Think about the consistency of your annual calendar. Replicate these top tips throughout each event to create consistency. Creating a routine can reduce anxiety by knowing what to expect and encouraging neurodiverse students to return.

### Josh, who has ADHD, offers his Top Tips:

Always do a run through of a new drill, whether that be at full speed, a walkthrough, or even a demonstration. It's important to use more than your words – I didn't come to training to listen, I came to do!

When working with neurodiverse young sportspeople, resist the urge to correct in a negative way, instead praise accomplishments and patiently offer advice. Offset their perfectionism, reminding them that they are good enough, whilst encouraging them on what they can improve.