



## Neurodiverse Events | Toolkit

Designing events with consideration for neurodiverse minds creates a safer, more inclusive environment for everyone and drives innovation. All brains are neurodiverse, but some brains respond in specific ways to our world. We can help people navigate these challenges through inclusive, pro-active measures. Common neurodivergence includes ADHD, autism, epilepsy, Tourette syndrome and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). Neurodivergent people make up an estimated 15-20% of the population.

### Communications

- Provide/collect information: Provide information including agenda, dress code, menus, maps etc. The stress of preparing for an event can cause people to cancel due to illness or meltdown. Advance information helps to prepare. Collect information on requested accommodations and provide detailed directions to events. Provide information on unexpected sensory experiences (lights, smells, sounds). Indicate if speaker materials will be available before and/or after the event.
- Design materials purposefully: Consider the use of colour (see next page) and font (Arial 12 point, 1.5 spacing recommended). Adding visual images of the space and speakers is also helpful.
- Commitment to diversity: State that the event welcomes all neurodiverse types and take requests for accommodations.

### Key Terms

- **Neurodiversity**: Range of differences in brain function and behavioral traits
- **Neurodivergent** or **neuro-distinct**: Differing from what is considered typical
- **Meltdown**: A strong emotional response to intense overwhelming stimuli. Not equivalent to a child's tantrum. Instead it's a call for help. Give them time to recover from the overload. Calmly ask them if they are OK – knowing they may take time to respond – and make a quiet, safe space around them.
- **Shutdown**: a response to overwhelming stimuli causing a neurodiverse person to withdraw from the world around them
- **Safefood**: a food that brings a neurodivergent person comfort and peace while eating it



## Content

- Printing: The ability to print content in advance helps those who need more time to process it or a way to process it visually.
- Media diversity: Visuals including diagrams, photos and infographics may help those who process information differently.
- Representation: Include people representing neurodiverse groups in the planning and delivery of the event, including as speakers.
- Topics: Provide conversation topics/cards to help prepare for interactions and conversations. Predictability increases comfort.
- Structure: Short sessions of up to 30 minutes in length interspersed with short breaks help with focus and to manage sensory overwhelm, meltdown or shutdown.
- Language: Reframe neurodivergence by using words like “difference” instead of “disorder”.

## Format

- Hybrid: A hybrid format (both live and online) is more inclusive than either option on their own. It provides the option to attend in-person, virtually and anonymously and to consume the content in the way they feel most comfortable.
- Multiple seating options: A variety of options including rounds, theatre, sitting or standing gives the ability to limit interaction if desired.
- Avoid accidental disclosures: Automatically plan for good sound (mics), captioning, accessible spaces etc. This means fewer people will be forced to disclose a specific challenge, preserving privacy and dignity.
- Encourage people to be comfortable: Tell people they are free to sit, stand or leave the room at their discretion.

## Food

- Buffets: Food can be challenging for the neurodiverse due to sensory aversions that might produce physical reactions including gagging. A buffet offers opportunities to customize.
- Safefood: This provides a reliable sensory experience that improves attendee comfort. Consider adding an information question at registration in the dietary section.



## Alternate Spaces

- Quiet rooms or pods: This can provide a safe space away from a busy event room with noise, harsh lighting and other triggers like too much social interaction. The ability to consume event content there is also helpful.
- Outdoor access: When selecting a venue, access to an outdoor space should be considered. This can provide a safe space to avoid sensory overload.

## Anxiety management

- Fidget toys: If providing swag items, consider branded fidget toys to help regulate sensory overload. Alternatively, have a few of these available on request at registration.
- Ear plugs: having a few ear plugs available at the registration desk can help mitigate potential meltdowns

## Colour

- Neurodivergent people can respond strongly to certain colours
- Think about use of colour in lighting, materials & décor
- Avoid reds as they can be triggering
- Greens, yellows, oranges, browns lavenders and pinks can be soothing
- Avoid stark white backgrounds in documents and presentations like PowerPoints
- Instead, use cream or light grey backgrounds  
(For example, this document uses hex #FFFFFF7)

**Source:** The NEU Project: [An Event Professional's Guide to Neuroinclusion](#), August 2023