

Balanced Living

May 2025



Understanding and Supporting Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity refers to the different ways that people's brains work and process information. No two people are exactly the same in how they view their environment and respond to it. Additionally, people have different strengths and challenges based on how their brain functions.

Understanding the Terms

Neurodivergent is another related term. This is used to describe people whose brains developed differently from most people, affecting how they function. People who aren't neurodivergent are referred to as neurotypical.

Neurodivergent is often used in the context of people with autism spectrum disorders, other neurological conditions, or learning disabilities. However, other people may identify as neurodivergent, including those who have not received a formal diagnosis.

The term neurodiversity was first coined by a sociologist named Judy Singer in the late 1990s. She wanted to encourage a more positive view of neurodivergence rather than labeling people as normal or abnormal.

Signs of Being Neurodivergent

People who identify as neurodivergent have different preferences from most people when it comes to social interactions, learning environment, and communication. For example, an individual who is neurodivergent might struggle to filter out external stimuli and cannot function in an environment with loud noises or bright lights.

An individual might also struggle with:

- Focus and concentration
- Organizing thoughts
- Disruptions to their routine

It's also important to note that someone who is neurodivergent has many unique strengths as well, which may include innovative thinking, attention to detail, and taking the initiative in certain situations.

Promoting Acceptance and Inclusivity

Let's take a look at some ways that you can promote acceptance and inclusivity of neurodiversity in various settings, including the workplace.

- Consider how you communicate. Everyone has different preferences in how they communicate with others. Someone who identifies as neurodivergent might struggle to communicate with others for various reasons. For example, they might prefer written communication, such as email, versus a phone call so they have more time to think about what they want to say. They might prefer to see work assignments or updates in writing.

Often direct and concise communication is ideal. You can ask them directly about their preferences.

- Take the time to listen. Make sure to give individuals time to speak or respond. It might take someone who identifies as neurodivergent more time to formulate what they want to say or to find the right words.
- Avoid making assumptions. Get to know someone as an individual rather than making assumptions. No two people are the same.
- Offer a flexible work environment when possible. Individuals who consider themselves neurodivergent might excel with certain accommodations, such as being able to wear headphones at times to block out background noise.

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Becoming an Accepting and Supportive Person

Many members of the LGBTQIA+ community face obstacles and may be hindered due to the biases of others, in life and in the workplace. Therefore, it's important to take an opportunity to self-reflect on our own beliefs and actions, as well as how they affect those around us. As the Greek philosopher Socrates once said, "An unexamined life is not worth living." Though we should always treat others with respect and kindness, we might fall short at times or not realize how exactly to show support. If you would like to work on being an accepting and supportive ally to the LGBTQIA+ community, here are some points to consider.

Individuality makes us human. It takes all different types of people to make the world go round. As long as one's actions don't harm others, no one should be shamed or threatened for expressing their uniqueness. You can still respect and support someone else even if you don't agree with everything they believe or do.



Expand your horizons. Try being more receptive to new people. If you tend to interact with the same people in your daily routine, challenge yourself to say hello to someone new. Maybe it's someone you cross paths with on a regular basis but have never really talked with. Could you be more open to having dialogue with people who have different beliefs and points of view? Think of it as an opportunity to grow and expand your own perspective. Make sure to be respectful when engaging in dialogue with others, even if your points of view differ.

Be mindful of your own judgments or assumptions. We all make judgments, and sometimes it can feel like an automatic process in our brain. If you notice that you jump to immediate judgments about others, practice shifting your brain to simply making observations.

Also, avoid making assumptions about others. We might do this when we are out in public observing strangers or with people we know in our daily lives. However, we can never know the inner workings of someone else unless they tell us. As Don Miguel Ruiz wrote in his book *The Four Agreements*, "It is always better to ask questions than to make an assumption."

Take the time to listen. Challenge yourself to truly listen when conversing with others, rather than just waiting for your turn to talk. As the Dalai Lama once said, "When you talk, you are only repeating what you know. But when you listen, you learn something new."

Ask others how you can support them. Don't be afraid to be direct and ask your friends, family, or others in your life how you can best support them.

Not everyone will agree on some things. Try not to let others' opinions and beliefs affect you negatively. Instead, focus on what you can do. Continue to spread positivity and maintain an open mindset even when others are not. If you see someone getting bullied or harassed in the workplace, offer your support, help them get to a safe space, and report the behavior through the appropriate channels. Remember to stay in control of your emotions, as this can help de-escalate the situation.

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Mental Health Awareness Month

As a student, it can be especially difficult to manage your mental health while juggling schoolwork and other responsibilities. Here are some tips for prioritizing your mental health so you can deal with stressful times more effectively and feel better overall.

Stick to a routine.

Sticking to a routine can improve your mental health by fostering a sense of purpose. Figure out what works for you: Plan out your day with a schedule or create a to-do list. It can be as detailed or as general as you prefer.

Make time for self-care.

It is important to recharge your batteries by incorporating downtime and self-care into your schedule. Give yourself permission to relax, even for a half hour each day. Ideas for self-care include reading, practicing an art, meditating, yoga, exercise, or spending time with friends.

Focus on the present moment.

Practicing mindfulness can be beneficial for your overall mental health. If you tend to have worry thoughts, bring your attention back to the current moment.

Connect with others.

Stay connected with family and friends by checking in regularly. You can also get involved in your campus and local community by attending a class or meetup. Doing a small act of kindness can brighten someone's day and help you feel good as well.

Make time for movement.

Try to incorporate movement into your daily routine. When struggling with mental illness, you might not feel motivated to do much. However, even some light stretching, going for a walk, or anything that gets your blood flowing can help you feel better mentally and physically.

Prioritize sleep.

Don't skimp on sleep, which can contribute to feelings of stress, anxiety, and depression. Your body and mind need adequate rest each night in order to function properly.

Seek professional support.

Don't be afraid to take the first step and get the help of a professional counselor. Check out what services are available on your college campus. Online therapy is also becoming a popular option.

Webinar Now Available:

Fostering an LGBTQIA Inclusive Workplace

Fostering an LGBTQIA Inclusive Workplace

Even with recent successes in social justice and popular culture, some gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and gender non-conforming employees still face bias, homophobia and discrimination in the workplace. The resulting fear and stress not only affect work performance but overall morale in environments that are not accepting or inclusive in varying degrees. In this workshop we will clarify sexual orientation and gender identity to better prepare all participants to collectively foster an inclusive working environment for all LGBT and gender non-conforming employees.



Log-in any time this month to watch the webinar!

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Mental Health Month

Break the Stigma and Prioritize Your Wellbeing:

Mental health is a crucial part of our overall health and wellbeing. Mental health includes our emotional, physiological, and social wellbeing. The way we think, act, and feel are affected by our mental health as well as how we manage stress, relate to others, and make choices.

Mental health is important throughout all stages of life, and it is important to note that mental health and mental illness are not the same thing. While anyone can have periods of poor mental health, not everyone has a mental illness.

Positive mental health allows individuals to realize their full potential, cope with the stresses of life, work productively, and make meaningful contributions to their communities!

Get regular exercise: Physical activity improves mood, self-esteem, sleep, and mental clarity.

Eat a balanced diet: Good nutrition fuels brain health and emotional stability.

Practice relaxation techniques: Meditation, deep breathing, and yoga can help reduce anxiety and tension.

Stay socially connected: Meaningful interactions and community involvement can improve your mood and outlook.

Seek professional help: Counseling can provide guidance, coping tools, and support during challenging times.

Know the Early Warning Signs:

Some signs of mental health challenges include changes in sleep or appetite, social withdrawal, feeling hopeless, increased substance use, mood swings, and difficulty performing daily tasks.

Help is Available:

If you or someone you know needs support, reach out:

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline – Call, text, or chat 988 for free, 24/7 confidential support.

MentalHealth.gov – Learn how to get help and find local resources.

SAMHSA's Treatment Locator – Find behavioral health treatment services in your area.

Source: 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline- Homepage

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline- Help Someone Else

CDC- Mental Health



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Nourishing Your Mind: The Importance of Lifelong Learning

Mental health needs shift as we move through life. What supports our wellbeing in one season may not be what we need in the next. Stress in early adulthood might stem from career pressures or identity-building, while in later years it may show up as loneliness, loss, or a lack of purpose. But one powerful practice supports us through every phase: lifelong learning. Staying mentally engaged offers structure, meaning, and joy. It reminds us that growth is always possible, even when life feels uncertain.

A Workout for the Brain

Keeping the brain active with learning is linked to improved mood and a decreased risk of cognitive decline. Research suggests that learning new things stimulates the brain in ways that can help prevent symptoms of depression and delay memory loss. Just like physical exercise strengthens the body, mental stimulation strengthens the mind.

Confidence, Resilience, and Mental Wellness

Learning something new—whether it's a small hobby or a larger goal—builds self-worth. Every new skill acquired reinforces the belief that we are capable and evolving. This is especially important when navigating feelings of burnout, stagnation, or major life transitions. Engaging the mind helps restore a sense of identity and control, both of which are essential to emotional wellbeing.

Support Through Life's Transitions

During times of change—retirement, becoming an empty nester, recovering from loss, or even shifting careers—mental health can feel especially fragile. Learning offers an anchor. It gives you something to look forward to, a way to stay connected to yourself and the world around you, and often, a chance to meet others who share your interests.

Simple Ways to Stay Engaged

Lifelong learning doesn't have to be formal, time-consuming, or costly—and it can take many different forms depending on your interests and lifestyle. Here are just a few approachable ways to begin incorporating lifelong learning into your everyday routine:

- Learn to play an instrument
- Try a new recipe
- Take a free online course
- Join a book club
- Learn a new language
- Grow an herb garden
- Explore a new craft
- Volunteer in your community
- Take up photography

No matter where you are in life, it's never too late—or too early—to begin again with curiosity. When we make space to grow, we make space to heal—and that's one of the most powerful things we can do for our mental health.

Source: <https://academic.oup.com/gerontologist/article-abstract/60/1/4/5128786?redirectedFrom=fulltext>



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Better Sleep Month: Easy Habits for Restful Sleep

As babies, it's all we do. As kids, we fight it. As adults, we miss it, and towards the end of life, we fear it. What is this elusive thing? Sleep.

We sleep every day but don't think much about it. Yet, it's vital that we get enough sleep—so much so that the month of May is recognized as Better Sleep Month. When we lack sleep, our bodies physically feel the decline in our health. Our exhausted brain makes concentrating and learning difficult, and we feel run down, making it harder to exercise and perform daily tasks. However, the importance of sleep on mental health is often overlooked.

Many of us know we feel better after a “good night's sleep” and tend to be grumpier when we don't sleep well. As a result, we negatively react to stressful and emotional situations, which worsens our mood. In addition to impacting mood, a lack of sleep affects the brain's functionality. During different stages of sleep, your brain processes information. It works to assess situations and recall thoughts and memories. Without this brain processing, you may experience a lack of understanding and recognition, which negatively affects your mental health. Lastly, sleep problems can cause the onset or decline of mental health disorders like depression and anxiety. Studies show that otherwise healthy people can feel higher amounts of anxiety and dejection after a night of insufficient sleep. Overall, it is clear that adequate sleep is vital for your mental health and wellbeing.

Now that we know how important sleep is, how can we go about improving it? Below are tips to get better sleep. Sweet dreams!

- **CREATE A BEDTIME ROUTINE**
- **LIMIT FOOD AND DRINK BEFORE SLEEP**
- **CREATE A RESTFUL SLEEPING ENVIRONMENT**
- **EXERCISE REGULARLY**
- **AVOID SLEEPING THROUGHOUT THE DAY**

Source: <https://www.sleepfoundation.org/mental-health>



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Strawberry Nice Cream

Ingredients

- 1 pound fresh strawberries
- 2 medium bananas
- 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
- ¼ cup ice-cold water, as needed

Directions

1. Hull and coarsely chop strawberries. Peel and coarsely chop bananas.
2. Spread the strawberries and bananas on separate sides of one baking sheet or on two sheets. Freeze until solid, at least 12 hours.
3. Let the strawberries thaw at room temperature for 15 minutes. Transfer to a food processor; pulse until finely chopped, about 10 pulses.
4. Add the frozen bananas and lemon juice; process until smooth, 1 to 1 1/2 minutes, adding up to 1/4 cup cold water if needed to achieve desired consistency, stopping to scrape down sides of bowl as needed.
5. Serve immediately or, for a firmer texture, transfer to a freezer-safe container and freeze for up to 30 minutes.

TIPS

To make ahead: Freeze fruit (Step 1), transfer to separate sealable plastic bags and freeze for up to 6 months.

Nutrition

Per Serving: 1 Cup

Calories: 191 | Protein: 1g | Carbohydrates: 23g | Dietary Fiber: 4g | Saturated Fat: 0g | Total Sugars: 13 g | Sodium: 2mg

Source: <https://www.eatingwell.com/recipe/272846/strawberry-nice-cream/>

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Working Solutions



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Develop a Perseverance Mindset

Have you ever interacted with a coworker so focused on work that they didn't know when to quit? You may have been witnessing the work trait of perseverance—the ability to demonstrate sustained effort despite obstacles and setbacks. Any worthwhile goal will face obstacles. While perseverance may appear like workaholicism, it's goal-directed rather than pathological. Many people are ambitious, possessing the desire, motivation, and excitement to achieve a goal. However, they lack the perseverance needed to make it happen. Perseverance is the bridge to the goal. Research shows perseverance is the #1 predictor of work success and personal achievement. To create this driving force within yourself, spend time on the first step: Create a powerful “why” so compelling that you'll laugh in the face of obstacles. Really dig deep. When you reach the “big why,” it will feel like rocket fuel. The rest is mechanics: create steps to the goal, track progress, anticipate and embrace challenges, practice positive self-talk, shun distractions, stay inspired, and reward yourself for progress.

Avoid Common Regrets with Elderly Loved Ones

When an elderly family member passes away, it's common to regret missed chances for a deeper connection. Research reveals common regrets that, if understood, can help family members be more proactive and later more thankful for the time spent together. May is “Older Americans Month.” Consider taking steps inspired by the following regrets to engage more deeply with your elderly loved one: 1) not spending enough time to hear their unique stories, wisdom, and perspectives; 2) not trying to resolve past conflicts and rifts; 3) unspoken words of affection, along with a lack of appreciation and gratitude; 4) assuming there will always be time to connect or repair issues, taking time for granted; 5) not providing caregiving, emotional support, or help with difficult issues as an advocate; 6) not asking about their life experiences, childhood, family history, faces in photos, or personal wisdom. Source: www.samaritanj.org/hospice-blog-and-events/hospice-palliative-care-blog/end-life-regrets/

Maintain Healthy Boundaries Between Work and Home

Even employees who believe in keeping healthy boundaries between work and home struggle to do it. Research shows, however, that maintaining boundaries is good for you and your employer. Productivity does not suffer! In fact, keeping boundaries can help workplace productivity by reducing burnout and turnover, improving focus, and creating a more positive work environment. Here are five boundaries most people struggle to maintain. If you recognize any of them and are ready for change, contact the EAP to explore your next steps to make some or all happen: 1) not responding to work communications after hours; 2) having a dedicated place in your home to work—no, this is not only to avoid distractions but also to eventually train your brain to “turn on for work,” thereby improving productivity; 3) taking a real honest-to-goodness lunch break, rather than eating at your desk or skipping it altogether; 4) when possible, politely saying you can't take on more work or at least negotiating on deadlines; 5) making it step one when you arrive home to get out of your work clothes. Again, this ritual is not just about being more comfortable. It signals to your brain to destress and recognize the “day is over.” Learn more: hubstaff.com/blog/work-life-balance-statistics/

Discover JOMO—Joy of Missing Out

FOMO—the “fear of missing out”—is anxiety caused by the perception that others have more exciting lives. Social media often triggers it, but there's a flip side called “JOMO”—the joy of missing out. It's a conscious reaction to feeling controlled by social media, encouraging turning it off, reclaiming time, and focusing on mental health benefits. When hit by FOMO, stop. Take a break. Recognize it, then identify the positives in your life and be thankful. If possible, try a “technology-free” trip to the store or outing to feel fully present in the real world. Source: babbel.com/en/magazine/the-meaning-of-fomo-yolo

Parenting Tips: Spring Means Stress for Young People

Spring is usually an inspiring season, but it can also bring major stress for young people. Academic demands, social dynamics, and environmental changes all converge at once. During this time, they face pressure to perform, fit in, and make important life decisions. The list is long: exams, project deadlines, financial aid decisions, senior-year transitions, prom, graduation, college admission issues, FOMO, changing friendships and romantic relationships, disrupted sleep, extracurricular demands, anxiety about summer plans, and possibly moving away. These maturity-building challenges still benefit from parental support. The key is awareness and open communication—try asking, “Hey, Billy, how are you feeling about school right now?” Let them vent. Offer tips on scheduling and study habits. Encourage taking things one day at a time. Talk about the importance of breaks and sleep. Model good stress management. Stay alert for signs of mental health struggles: withdrawal, depression, or sleep or appetite changes. Don’t overlook the value of professional counseling. Ask your EAP for checklists on symptoms of anxiety, stress, and depression. And seek support for yourself to explore how balanced parenting—without overstepping—can help build resilience.

Mental Health Awareness Month

It’s “Mental Health Awareness Month.” Celebrate it by experimenting with this 30-day positivity exercise. Instructions: At night, before falling asleep, take a few moments to jot down one positive moment from the day, and take 60 seconds to really feel it again. Research demonstrates this exercise shows “neuroplasticity of the brain.” This refers to its ability to “rewire” itself and, in this case, nurture a more positive mental attitude—one that is more optimistic, resilient, and emotionally balanced. Supportive research: [pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8640953/](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8640953/)

Building Teams: When Unreliability Strikes

It’s not uncommon to have an unreliable team member, but most coworkers hold back too long in being assertive, hoping for change, improved performance, or follow-through with commitments. Sound familiar? Assertiveness often creates tension, and your fear of losing group harmony or fear of conflict, or simply not wanting the emotional burden of confronting a coworker is understandable. But avoidance risks hurting your team. Solution: Create traditions and shared values your team agrees to uphold, so when assertiveness is needed, it’s seen as a commitment to those values—not a personal attack. If you do this, you’ll increase productivity and accountability, and cohesiveness will ironically increase. If you’re struggling now, meet and get agreement on this assertiveness tradition. It will be okay to speak up sooner with respect. You’ll dispense with lingering frustrations and feel happier about your team with less fear about facing challenges. Hint: Ask the EAP about the language of assertiveness and how to maximize its impact while preserving trust and teamwork.

Stress Tips from the Field: Managing Stress One Day at a Time

“Take it one day at a time.” This common saying means “stay present-focused” as a way of managing stress, but many related tips can help maximize this mindset—freeing you from spiraling into fear, sleep loss, and burnout. Consider: Avoid being overwhelmed by staying in the present. Still acknowledge today’s stressors, but address only what is in front of you. Limit catastrophic thinking and “what-ifs” by focusing on what can be done now. Ground yourself in the moment and take purposeful action, even if small. This reduces anxiety and the risk of imagined worst-case scenarios. Let go of what you can’t control. Build resilience through daily coping. Practice self-compassion—it muzzles your inner critic. Start the day with a simple goal to focus on the here and now, and realize that today’s challenges build resilience for tomorrow’s hurdles.

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