

April is Autism Acceptance and Advocacy Month

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History:

April has been Autism month since 1970 and has been official at the federal level since 1988 as Autism Awareness Month. In 2021, the name changed to Autism Acceptance Month to focus on intentional inclusion and encouraging Autistic people to lead more fulfilling lives, rather than treating the condition like an illness.

Neurodiversity:



- The Neurodiversity movement (based on the concept of biodiversity) is a framework for advocating that people with traditionally thought of disorders (like autism and ADHD) offer strengths and should be celebrated across the human spectrum.
- Neurodiverse individuals often still have barriers to meeting their own goals. Support people should work to help reduce the barriers defined by the person opposed to only working on barriers that support people see.
- Autism currently affects 1 in 36 people (CDC, 2020) so there is a good chance that people you know have autism.

Parents of neurodiverse children

- Meet your child where they are at. Use empathy phrases to communicate that you understand when they are upset (even if it is a seemingly small thing).
- Allow for extra time or practice opportunities when required schedule changes are anticipated.
- People with Autism are often strongly routine driven—practice predictable routines for daily tasks but plan in times to also practice flexibility by taking different routes home or reinforcing when they are okay with last minute changes.
- Practicing calm down strategies *before* your child gets upset can help them when unexpected situations happen. Tools like squeeze and release, deep breathing, rolling their shoulders and asking for space are great practices to include throughout the day.

Parents of neurotypical children:

- Teach your child that people that are different from them do not always have to be scary and may have common interests or a new perspective to share.
- When your child expresses curiosity about peers different from them, encourage them to ask questions in a friendly, respectful way.
- Tell your children that not everyone communicates by speaking what they have to say. Some people talk using sign language, a communication device, or pictures. If they ask a neurodiverse person a question and they do not respond, that is okay and not something to fear.
- Read books that promote inclusion of people with physical and non-physical disabilities.

Book ideas for building relationships between Neurodiverse and Neurotypical children and discussing hard topics like anxiety and worry:

