



Tip Sheet for Advising Students

What is Neurodiversity and Autism?

Neurodiversity is an inclusive term that emphasizes the abilities of people with “brain differences” that are distinct from what is considered “typical.” As a social justice movement, neurodiversity aims to recognize the strengths and unique challenges of those with autism, ADHD and other neurological differences.

Autism is a neurodevelopmental condition characterized by challenges in socialization, communication and behavior.

How might this present while advising?

Common Strengths:

- ◇ Ability to become highly focused and deeply engaged in a topic or program of study
- ◇ Reliance on routine and consistency can lead to positive behaviors that promote health and academic achievement
- ◇ Desire to connect with others
- ◇ Ability to look at problems from a unique perspective
- ◇ Awareness of the “rules” may lead to honest and straightforward communication style

Common Challenges:

- ◇ Difficulties with transitions and changes in schedule
- ◇ Difficulty engaging in group projects (exhausting but necessary social contacts)
- ◇ Narrow and specific interest (difficulty exploring courses or topics outside of their area of interest)
- ◇ Difficulty with big picture, persevere on the details (can’t see the forest for the trees)
- ◇ Difficulty with abstract thinking (concrete, focuses on irrelevant details, difficulty generalizing)
- ◇ Processing information and time management (Sensory overload)
- ◇ Frequent errors in interpreting others’ body language, intentions, or facial expressions

What can I do to provide support?

- ◇ Establish trust and prepare student for unexpected changes
- ◇ Consider the students preference related to group work when recommending classes
- ◇ Use language that is concrete and direct especially when discussing core requirements
- ◇ Seek the most effective method of communication and allow flexibility for the use of that method (Visual materials such as emails, slides, models, and demonstrations tend to work best)
- ◇ Supplement oral with written instructions
- ◇ Consider requesting a follow up email to ensure agreement and/or understanding
- ◇ Create an environment that encourages students to voice needs proactively
- ◇ Be aware that sensory overstimulation may affect students (noisy office, fluorescent lighting)
- ◇ Encourage all students’ use of resources designed to help students with study skills, particularly organizational skills

Whom should I talk to?

If student self-identifies as a student with a disability, refer student in writing to:

Student Disability Access Office
Phone: 919-668-1267
sdao@duke.edu
access.duke.edu

If student does not self-identify as a student with a disability, but student is in need of support:

DukeReach
Phone: 919-681-2455
dukereach@duke.edu
<https://studentaffairs.duke.edu/dukereach1>

If you would like to learn more about Neurodiversity and Autism:

Duke Neurodiversity Connections
neurodiversity@duke.edu
<https://sites.duke.edu/neurodiversityatduke/>