



## Faculty Tip Sheet for Assisting Students who are Neurodiverse

### 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 in the classroom?

#### Common Strengths:

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

#### Common Challenges:

- ◇ Frequent errors in interpreting others’ body language, intentions, or facial expressions
- ◇ Difficulty with big picture, perseverate on the details (can’t see the forest for the trees)
- ◇ Difficulties with transitions and changes in schedule
- ◇ Literal understanding of language (difficulty interpreting words with double meanings, difficulty with metaphors and sarcasm)
- ◇ Difficulty with abstract thinking (concrete, focuses on irrelevant details, difficulty generalizing)
- ◇ Processing information and time management (Sensory overload )
- ◇ Difficulty engaging in group projects (exhausting but necessary social contacts)

### What can I do to provide support?

- ◇ Provide clear expectations and course requirements
- ◇ Orient to classroom rules using language that is concrete and direct
- ◇ Don’t require students to “read between the lines” to glean your intentions
- ◇ Consider making syllabus/materials available in advance
- ◇ Supplement oral with written instructions when revising assignments, dates, etc.
- ◇ Consider requesting a follow up email to ensure agreement.
- ◇ Reconsider restricting access to technology (laptops, iPad, etc.) in the classroom as many students utilize these tools to self-accommodate
- ◇ 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)
- ◇ Be aware that sensory overstimulation may affect students (noisy labs, 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**

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