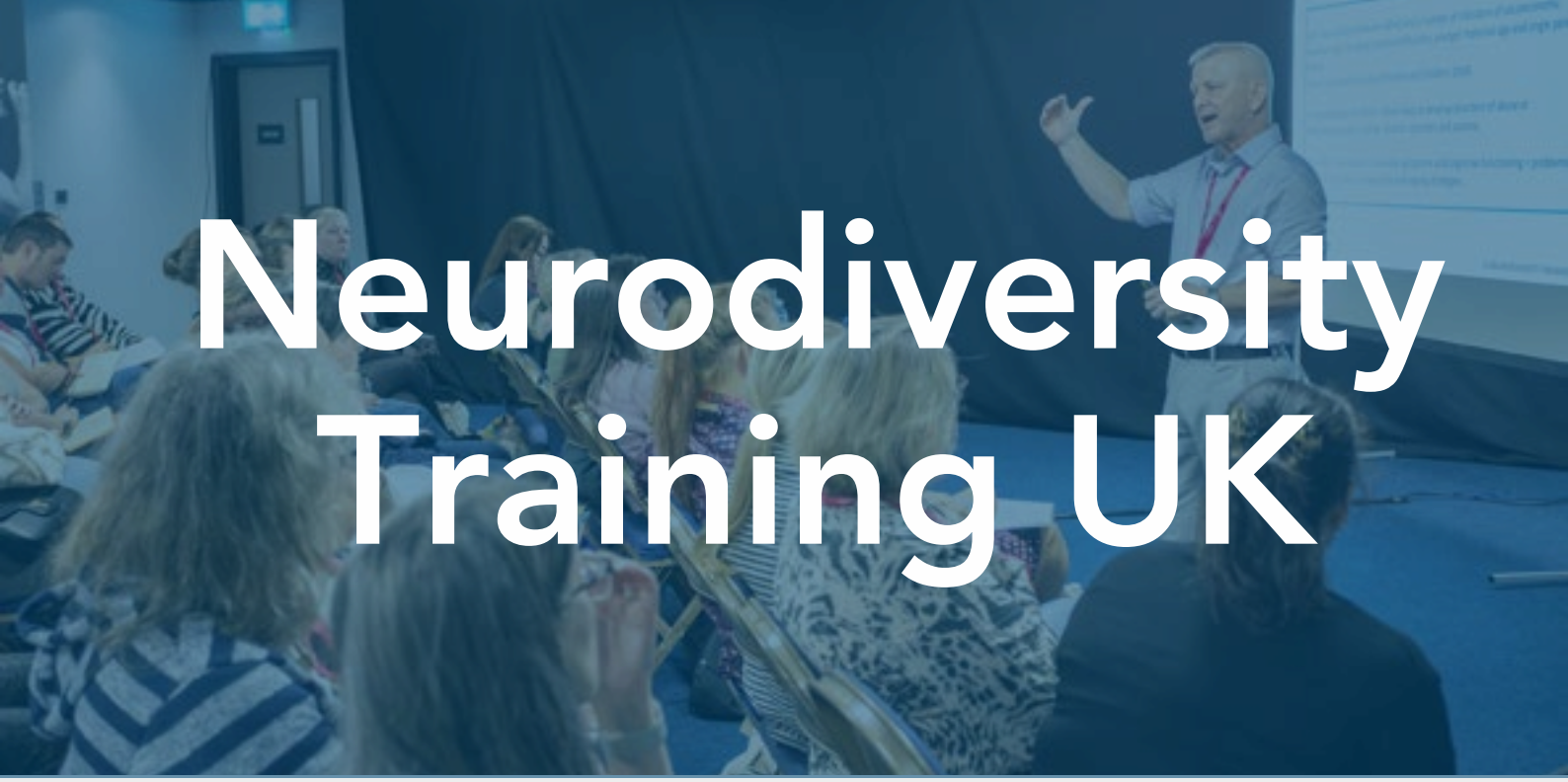


Neurodiversity Training UK

Adaptive strategies to lead a neurodiverse classroom.

@NDtrainingUK

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Introduction

The number of children and young people being identified and diagnosed with neurodivergent conditions is increasing across the UK.

Exploring adaptive strategies in classrooms to meet their needs has been a central feature of educational discourse and policy in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England in recent years.

In England, the publication of the Government's White Paper, "Every child achieving and thriving" in February 2026 places adaptive teaching practices at the heart of the new SEND system, starting in 2029. Ofsted are inspecting schools now with the new Inclusion Framework.

Neurodiversity Training UK has created this free booklet to offer you a range of ideas, approaches and structures to adapt your classroom.
Instead of exploring different neurodivergent conditions, we have taken a thematic approach to address the question- how can I adapt my approach when there are a variety of neurotypes in my class? What are the overarching considerations?

We explore five of them here- Attention, Engagement, Executive Function, Environment and Memory.

We hope you find it useful. Thank you.

Colin Foley
CEO Neurodiversity Training UK

Five considerations

01. Attention 

02. Engagement 

03. Executive Function 

04. Environment 

05. Memory 

Attention

When we think about challenges with attentional regulation, we often think of ADHD but what about Autism? or specific learning differences?

Monotropism is a feature of Autism and is a single focus cognitive style. Making too many attentional demands and shifts can lead to the learner being overwhelmed, similar to ADHD.

If the learner is anxious about a specific area of learning, for example, a Dyslexic learner being asked to read or a Dyscalculic learner working with numbers, their anxiety will block the brain and make sustained attention more difficult.







Attention

Firstly, consider the **Mode of Attention** you are asking the learners to work in.....

Sustained attention: prolonged period of time on one stimuli.

Focused attention: on one task, ignoring distractions.

Selective attention: prioritise relevant information within one or more stimuli.

Alternating attention: sometimes shift focus between more than one task.

Divided attention: processing multiple sources of information.

Attentional filtering: ongoing process of focusing on important information and ignoring distractions.

Adaptations to support Attention

1. How is the material presented?

If written text, remove irrelevant content, highlight key vocabulary and pre-teach, do a text preview before reading, structure in comprehension pauses.

2. How the teacher is positioned?

Use your positioning to support different attention points- if referring to a screen, stand by it or if just you talking to the class, move to the side.Establish routines.

3. How many changes are required?

Consider whether all changes in modes of Attention are necessary? How many ? How often? Give forewarning and countdowns.

4. How are Attentional tools used?

Introduce the tool for the task, not for the entire lesson. Consider legs not hands and away from the desk top.

5. How can we use the space?

Your classroom is a flexible space, move the learners to maximise attention. Consider zoned spaces if you can, reading corners or attention stations.

6. How can we use lesson structure?

Clearly defined end points to tasks using timers, sharing or review comments from the learners. Build in buffer time between tasks.

7. How can we use movement?

Consider the use of movement to increase attention, to differentiate between different attention points as a routine.

8. How can we use narration?

Continually refer to the attention point in your lesson narration as routine.



Engagement

"Engagement is everything.

We can understand ADHD and Autism as engagement and interest driven neurotypes- consider hyperfocus and monotropism- the level of interest that the learner has in the material being taught really matters.

Building engagement in reading through pre-reading activities is one of the most powerful strategies to support Dyslexic learners.

Building engagement in Maths through real word applications for their Maths work is one of the most powerful strategies to support Dyscalculic learners."

Colin Foley CEO Neurodiversity Training UK

Adaptations to build engagement

1. Include Active learning technigues.

Activties such as group discussions with clear end points, role play, improvisation tasks or practical problem solving, add a time element if appropriate.

2. Collaborative learning.

Provide pairs or group working opportunities, model effective collaborative work if needed- designate specific roles and divide the activity into planning and application stages.

3. Learner Voice

Giving your learners a say in the lesson encourages ownership and motivation- start small, for example, discussion points or deciding methods of demonstrating learning.

4. Use Technology.

Introduce interactive whiteboards, online quizzes or videos to build interest in the content.

5.Open ended questioning

This can immediately shift your learners from passive listeners to active thinkers, use prompts to generate original examples, draw comparisons and explain thinking.

6. Movement based learning activities.

Short bursts of physical activity can refresh focus. Activities such as stand-and-discuss, quick stretches, or rotating between stations.

7. Gamification

Incorporate elements of gamification to build interest, add pace and increase activity overall- provide immediate feedback or increase level of challenge.

8. Story telling.

Everyone enjoys an interesting story, incorporate elements of your content into story form, develop this by encouraging learners to predict what happens next or to complete the story.



Executive Function

Executive function refers to mental processes (executive functioning skills) that help you set and carry out goals. You use these skills to solve problems, make plans and manage emotions.

These skills will include cognitive flexibility, inhibition control, emotional regulation,working memory, time management, prioritising and self- monitoring. Most importantly, goal directed behaviour.

These are critical skills for success in education.

Extensive research over many decades has shown us that there can be developmental delays in executive functioning skills with neurodivergent children and young people.

Adaptations to support executive functioning.

1.Creating a structured environment.

Create a well-organised physical space, arrange the classroom in a way that minimises distractions and promotes focus. Materials and resources easily accessible and labelled.

2. Graphic Organisers.

Use graphic organisers to help learners organise their thoughts, make connections, refer back to and promote visual processing.

3. Task analysis narration.

Break down complex tasks into smaller, manageable steps. Provide learners with checklists or visual guides to help them navigate the task and monitor their progress.

4. Self reflection activities

Incorporate regular reflection exercises where learners can evaluate their own learning, identify useful strategies, reflect on strengths, areas for improvement, and goal-setting.

5. Teach time management

Activities such as visual timetables, creating schedules, setting priorities and undertaking time estimation discussions, low stakes deadlines with opportunities to review.

6. Support emotional regulation

Techniques such as deep breathing exercises, mindfulness, grounding, “shaking out” activities and self-soothing strategies with tactile resources and low arousal spaces.

7. Encourage flexible thinking.

Plan for activities that require learners to consider multiple perspectives, think outside the box and adapt their strategies based on new information or feedback. Foster a classroom culture that values openness and flexibility.

8.Opportunities for decision making.

Offer choices and decision-making opportunities within appropriate boundaries to promote decision-making skills, considering consequences and take responsibility for choices.



Environment

The physical environments in which we are teaching children and young people can be one of our biggest challenges.

Many schools and colleges were not designed with an understanding of neurodivergence.

The challenges can be wide ranging from sensory overload for autistic learners to attentional overwhelm for learners with ADHD trying to focus in busy, noisy classrooms with a lot of distractions.

How can we adapt the physical environment so that all of our learners can feel safe, comfortable and thrive?

Adaptations to the physical environment

1.Consider external distraction

What is coming in from outside? Closing the blinds on windows, covering glass panes in doors, asking colleagues not to "pop in" at certain times.

2. Reducing peripheral distraction task by task.

Explore resources that can help adapt the immediate environment depending upon the task, facing learners away from their peers, screens, ear defenders, ,concentration station and booths.

3. A Sensory audit.

Undertake a full sensory audit of the classroom environment. Audit tools to help with this are available online. Include pupil voice to support this.

4. Displays

Displays can be useful teaching tools but also overstimulating at the same time. Consider covering displays or using only in certain areas of the teaching space.

5. Zoning

If you are fortunate to have this opportunity, consider creating specific zones, for example, distinct spaces for reading, group work, movement or self calming.

6. The Outdoors.

Working outside can enhance the learning and well being of your learners. There are opportunities to move, learn more visually and use equipment that may not be possible in a smaller space.

7. Break out spaces.

If you have the opportunity to explore the use of break out spaces, their use can effectively support diverse needs, for example, group work alongside quiet spaces for sustained concentration.

8. The whole school environment.

Sensory needs don't stop at the classroom door, consider the communal areas of school, is there a need for a sensory space? How can we support learners in the environments of non- contact time?



Memory

Many neurodivergent learners can have challenges with their Working Memory. This means the ability to hold information in mind whilst using the information at the same time. If information is not held in Working Memory, it cannot be processed into Long Term Memory.

This can result in increased levels of anxiety for children and young people. Anxiety blocks the brain and can make retention of information or instructions even more difficult.

If the learner is having difficulties managing the sensory environment or coping with distractions, this will directly impact upon their ability to hold information in mind and to retain information for the future.

Therefore, how can we support neurodivergent learners to remember?

Adaptations to support Memory

1. Dual Coding

Routinely use both visual and verbal elements to convey information effectively. Dual Coding minimises cognitive overload and helps learners to remember.

2. Variety

Explore content through a variety of forms- written text, talk, visuals, building, making, drawing and be creative- podcasts, voice messages, texts, role play, posters.

3. Spaced Retrieval

Research suggests that the most effective retrieval practice is Spaced Retrieval, leaving gaps between lessons to continually revisit content. Present the content in different ways to stimulate the attentional system.

4. Talk opportunties

The voice that you listen most closely to is your own. Provide regular opportunities for learners to articulate their learning- this will help encode content into long term memory.

5. Low stakes quizzing.

Regular, short quizzes, every lesson. Brief answers and they can expand upon them later. Keep it low stakes, it is about remembering and not winning!

6. Create memorable moments.

Episodic Memory is one of the most powerful forms of Memory- this is our memory of events that happen to us. Make learning memorable, create rituals, ask learners to present, creating atmospheric moments with lights, use of space, music etc

7. Planning tasks.

Examples such as annotating the question, mind-mapping or devising a paragraph plan can prompt learners to delve deeper into long term memory or planning tasks with clear expectations, for example, "give an explanation then an example" or"write two examples here" can stimulate retrieval.

8. Make it personal.

Relate the content to their lived experience. The learner is more likely to remember if they understand a direct relevance to them. Safely ask learners to apply content in relation to their lives.

Developing adaptive strategies across the whole school or college.

The training team at Neurodiversity Training UK have extensive experience in providing training, consultancy and other support services to schools, colleges and universities across the UK and abroad. We have worked with Buckinghamshire SEND Team, Gordonstoun School, UCLAN, Universities of Manchester, Chester, York St Johns and LJMU, South Bank Colleges, York LEA, International School of Dusseldorf, British Schools of Tokyo & Dubai, Chester Schools Together, NAS, Sandwell, Rochdale and Cheshire West Headteachers to name just a few. We have presented at the TES SEND Show and the National Education Show, Wales for the last three years.





Training opportunties.

The trainers at Neurodiversity Training UK can offer training opportunities in the areas listed on the following page or can adapt the content to meet your specific needs.

Training sessions can be in person, virtual or in recorded formats.

Course organisers will be offered a pre-session meeting in order for our trainers to create a bespoke experience tailored to their specific nursery, school, college or university.

All course participants will be offered further reference materials after course completion.

All courses are offered in full day, half day or shorter sessions, for example, 60 or 90 minute after school twilight sessions.



Training Menu

Understanding and Supporting specific neurodivergent conditions in education, practical strategies to support ADHD, AuDHD, Autism, Dyslexia, Dyscalculia, Dysgraphia, Dyspraxia/ DCD and Tourette's syndrome.

Supporting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing, including Anxiety, RSD, OCD and difficulties with food.

Introduction to Neurodiversity in Education.

Leading a Neurodiverse classroom & Adaptive strategies.

Supporting executive functioning skills in the classroom.

Supporting Literacy and ADHD.

Supporting Memory in the classroom.

Girls, young women and neurodivergence, including masking.

Supporting Neurodivergence in Early Years.

If you would to explore designing a bespoke session, contact colinfoley@neurodiversitytraining.uk

The ADHD Neurodiversity Award & AuDHD Friendly School Award

Neurodiversity Training UK has two awards to recognise the great work going on in supporting neurodivergence in schools and colleges across the UK:

The ADHD Neurodiversity Award & The AuDHD Friendly School Award.

Both awards involve accessing training from the team at Neurodiversity Training UK, making a series a pledges to all of your children or young people with ADHD, Autism or both and collating and submitting evidence of this great work.

If you would like to know more, contact:

ColinFoley@neurodiversitytraining.uk



St Claire's Catholic Primary School, Cheshire celebrate their award in 2025

MEET THE TEAM



Anne Marie Harrison

Trainer- Neurodiversity Training UK
Specialist in ADHD, Autism, EY and working with families.



Colin Foley

Chief Executive Officer
Training Director- ADHD Foundation 2015- 2025



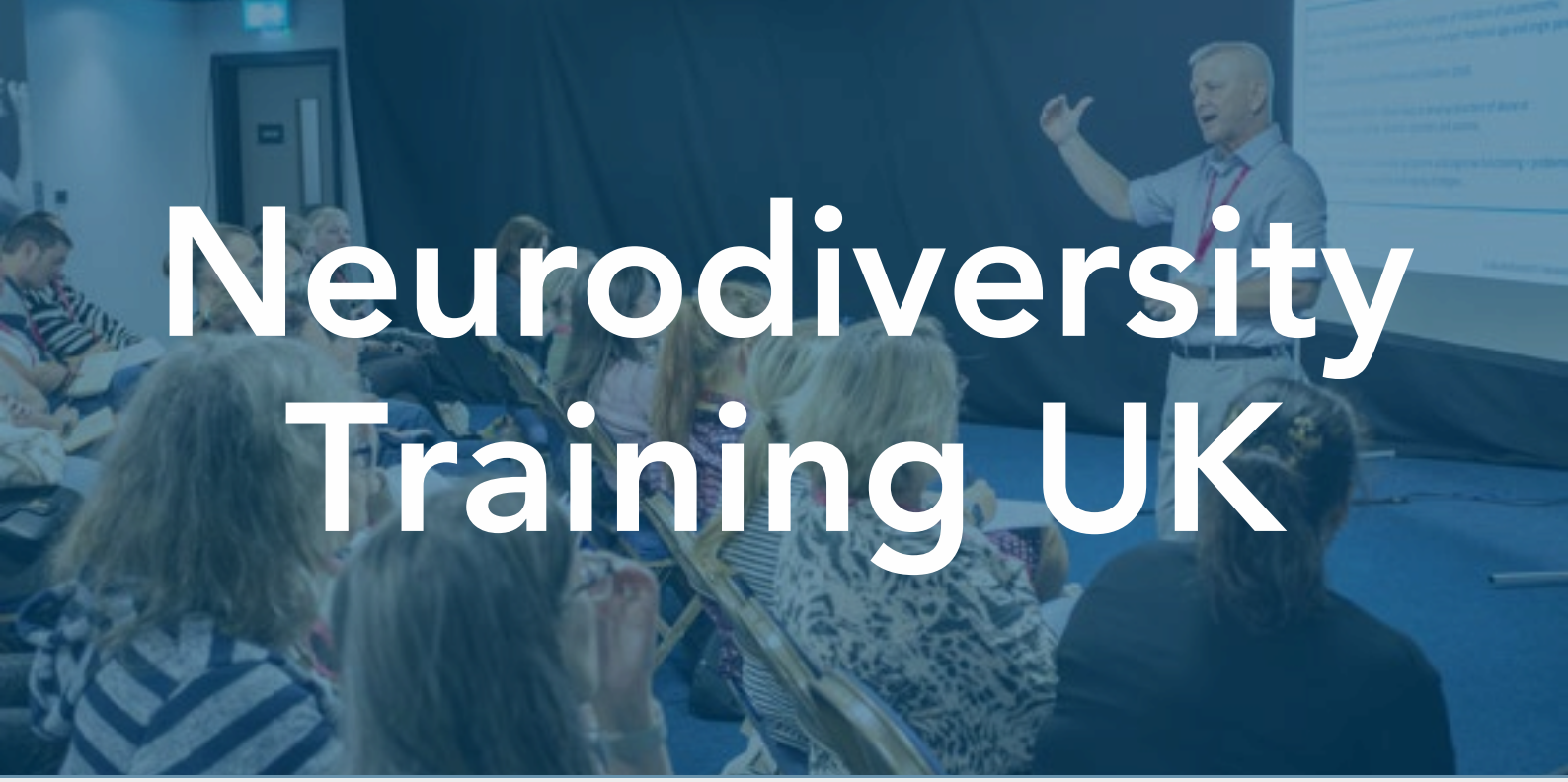
Dr Tony Lloyd

Trainer- Neurodiversity Training UK, Psychologist.



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