



Learn. Develop. Succeed.

# UNDERSTANDING **NEURODIVERSITY**

awareness | acceptance | advocacy



# Individual Case Study

## Supporting a Neurodivergent Child in an After-School Group

### Context

Alex is a 9-year-old with a vibrant imagination and a natural curiosity. Alex thrives in activities that involve storytelling, problem-solving, and hands-on exploration. However, they sometimes face challenges with focus during group activities, navigating transitions, and regulating emotions in noisy environments.

While Alex's strengths shine in many areas, their parents view their challenges as typical childhood behaviour and have not explored the possibility of neurodivergence. This creates an opportunity for the program staff to balance support for Alex's unique needs with fostering an environment where their strengths can flourish.

### Challenges

Alex struggles with transitions and sensory sensitivities but demonstrates strong self-awareness when provided with tools for managing these moments.

While Alex's enthusiasm and creativity often inspire others, their high energy can sometimes lead to misunderstanding among peers.

The team seeks to ensure Alex receives equitable support while maintaining a harmonious group dynamic.

Alex's parents emphasize traditional discipline strategies, which can clash with the staff's efforts to implement proactive, neuroaffirming practices.



# Individual Case Study

## Supporting a Neurodivergent Child in an After-School Group

### **Highlighting Alex's Strengths:**

Celebrate Alex's imaginative ideas and problem-solving skills, encouraging them to take leadership roles in creative projects.

Group activities are designed to allow Alex to showcase their talents, such as leading a storytime session or brainstorming solutions during team challenges.

### **Proactive Supports for Emotional Regulation:**

A "calm corner" with sensory items is introduced for all children, giving Alex and others a safe space to refocus when needed.

Mindfulness games and short relaxation exercises help Alex practice self-regulation in a fun and engaging way.

### **Building Peer Empathy**

Facilitators lead age-appropriate discussions about teamwork and celebrating differences, fostering a culture of inclusion.

Cooperative activities encourage peers to appreciate Alex's creativity while modeling patience and collaboration.



# Individual Case Study

## Supporting a Neurodivergent Child in an After-School Group

### **Universal Design for Learning (UDL):**

Activities are structured with multiple options for engagement, allowing Alex to choose how they participate while maintaining interest and focus.

Visual schedules and task breakdowns provide predictability, supporting Alex's ability to transition smoothly between activities.

### **Positive Parental Engagement:**

Regular updates to Alex's parents emphasize their accomplishments and the positive impact of specific strategies, framing challenges as opportunities for growth.

### **Potential Outcomes - Short-Term:**

Alex begins to use sensory tools independently and shows pride in their leadership roles, positively influencing group dynamics. Peers respond more empathetically, leading to fewer conflicts and stronger connections.

### **Potential Outcomes - Long-Term:**

As Alex becomes more comfortable with self-regulation strategies, they exhibit increased confidence and sustained engagement in activities. Parents begin to express curiosity about the program's approaches and request resources to support Alex at home.



# Group Case Study

## Supporting Multiple Neurodivergent Children in an After-School Group

### Context

Sam: A child with a strong ability to notice patterns and think creatively but sometimes overwhelmed by loud environments and struggles with transitions.

Mia: A child with a diagnosed learning difference who excels in persistence and attention to detail but takes longer to process verbal instructions.

Zoe: A highly empathetic learner who enjoys leading the group, but occasionally experiences difficulty with frustration and emotional regulation.

### Challenges

Adapting to verbal, visual, and kinesthetic learning preferences while maintaining group flow.

Ensuring activities provide meaningful opportunities for all children, leveraging their strengths while addressing individual needs.

Supporting collaboration and positive peer interactions amid varied social-emotional and sensory needs.



# Group Case Study

## Supporting Multiple Neurodivergent Children in an After-School Group

### **Creating Predictable and Calm Environments:**

Visual Schedules are displayed and reviewed at the beginning of each day to reduce anxiety and provide clarity.

A calm corner with sensory tools is available for all learners, normalizing the use of self-regulation strategies.

### **Promoting Positive Group Dynamics:**

Peer leadership and problem-solving strengths are leveraged by having the group help plan inclusive activities, building peer respect.

Staff lead team-building activities that celebrate diversity, such as a "Strengths Circle" where each child shares a talent or strength.

### **Activity Adaptations:**

Instructions are given verbally, visually (diagrams, task cards), and with hands-on modelling to support different processing styles and those who benefit from multi-modal communication.

An alternative activity is offered to give choice and autonomy.



# Group Case Study

## Supporting Multiple Neurodivergent Children in an After-School Group

### **Universal Design for Learning (UDL):**

Activities are structured to draw out each child's strengths. For example, Sam's pattern recognition is highlighted during puzzles and strategy games, Mia's attention to detail is valued in art projects, and Zoe helps organize distribute materials to the group.

Each activity is designed with flexible roles, such as designing, building, or leading, allowing every child to contribute in a way that suits them.

### **Social-Emotional Learning:**

All children are supported with activities like emotion charts, calming breaths, and cooperative problem-solving games.

Emotions are spoken about regularly and openly.

Staff reframe struggles as opportunities for growth, such as celebrating someone's actions that apologize and repair relationships after an outburst.



# Group Case Study

## Supporting Multiple Neurodivergent Children in an After-School Group

### Potential Outcomes - Short-Term:

Sam thrives when asked to identify patterns during activities, which builds confidence. He takes sensory breaks more frequently which reduces sensory overload.

Mia gains confidence as visual supports are normalized. The peers become more patient when she needs extra time to process.

Zoe learns to manage emotions more effectively, supported by a calmer environment and consistent routines.

The group begins empathizing with each other and starts to help each other.

### Potential Outcomes - Long-Term:

The group culture shifts toward inclusivity, with children naturally celebrating each other's contributions and supporting one another.

Families report positive changes at home, noting increased confidence and social skills in their children.

Staff report increased group engagement and smoother delivery of activities.





# Reflection Points

How can the program further leverage each child's strengths to create even more inclusive activities?

What additional strategies could support children in becoming co-creators of the program's inclusive environment?

How can facilitators continue to grow their skills to address evolving group dynamics and needs?



# Huddle Notes

Use visual and verbal cues to indicate physical boundaries. For example, use a rug to indicate where an activity is happening.

Make fidgets available for all children at all times.

Incorporate brain and body breaks, even in short activities.

Incorporate movement activity options as often as possible, especially before a seated activity.

Give children autonomy and choice in activities.

Give children time to observe activities and decide how they want to participate. Acknowledge that participating differently is ok.

By planning for children who do not want to participate, you acknowledge that some children may have needs and being prepared in advance reduces disruption.

Host a bring-your-parents day so they can be involved and observe program dynamics in real time.

Emphasize that supports are for everybody and avoid 'othering' children. If support is given to one child, try to make it available to the whole group if possible, as others will likely benefit from it, too.



# Resources

The **Amazing Things Project** is an animation initiative aimed at promoting understanding and acceptance in future generations. These fun and informative videos explain neurodiversity and share the experiences of Autistic children, as well as children with ADHD and dyslexia.

**GoNoodle** is a free, interactive, online platform designed to engage kids in physical activity and mindfulness exercises through fun, short videos.

**Harkla**, an innovative company in sensory tools and equipment, offers engaging YouTube videos that provide practical guidance on creating sensory corners, developing visual schedules, and fostering inclusive and supportive learning environments for all.

The **Neurowild** Facebook page is part of an initiative led by Em Hammond, an autistic and ADHD speech pathologist, artist, and advocate for neurodiversity. The page shares creative, insightful illustrations and resources that promote understanding and support for neurodivergent individuals, particularly in educational settings.

**Understood.org** is a non-profit organization with a comprehensive website featuring approachable information, tools, and resources for supporting people with learning differences at school, home, and work.

The **Universal Design for Learning (UDL): A Teacher's Guide** from Understood.org is a resource that introduces UDL as a framework for creating flexible, inclusive learning environments to support all students, regardless of how they learn. UDL is grounded in the idea that barriers to learning often arise from the design of the environment rather than the learner's abilities.



# Upcoming Workshop

**Join us January 21, 10-11:30am**  
**Behavioural Challenges, Mental Health and Learning**

## **Where we will cover:**

Common neurodivergent profiles and their relationship to behavioural challenges, mental health, and learning.

Exploring behaviours as communication and understanding what drives certain behaviours in neurodivergent individuals.

The impact of stigma, masking, and lack of accommodations on the prevalence of mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, and burnout in neurodivergent populations.

Strategies and tools to support neurodivergent learners with self-advocacy and empowerment to express their needs.

**Workshop recordings, Zoom links, and slides are all found on our website here: <https://ldsociety.ca/united-way-schools-out-program/>**

# **Thank you!**

LDS - Learn. Develop. Succeed.  
3292 East Broadway, Vancouver, BC  
Coast Salish Territories  
604.873.8139  
[info@ldsociety.ca](mailto:info@ldsociety.ca)

