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Sensory Wellbeing Solutions for Children

NEURO AFFIRMING SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS

SUPPORTING REGULATION & EMOTIONAL WELLBEING



CREATING A PATHWAY TO CALMER, MORE
EMOTIONALLY RESILIENT CHILDREN

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LANGUAGE PILLARS



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Neuroaffirming Language Guide

A neuro-affirming approach embraces diverse communication styles, welcoming people to connect authentically in ways that are true to who they are whether through words, gestures, electronic devices, stimming or silence.

It is about creating a community where everyone feels safe, valued, respected & included.

NEURODIVERGENCE

"Autism is a Neurodivergence; an Autistic person is Neurodivergent." Neurodivergence describes the existence or mind-body experience being Neurodivergent. It is a broad term and encompasses the state of being of anyone who's neurocognitive function differs from societal standards of neurotypical.

NEURODIVERGENT

"I have ADHD, I am neurodivergent." Is a person who diverges from the neurotype that benefits from and works with the way the society they live in operates. A person with multiple different neuro-cognitive neurodivergences can be called multiply neurodivergent.

NEUROTYPICAL

"Within this study there were multiple neurotypes." A neurotype refers to type of neurocognitive make up of a person. Neurotypical and Neurodivergent are neurotypes.

Ref: Neurodivergent Affirming Language Guide,
Scan QR code above to read article in full.



Neuro-affirming language emphasizes respect, acceptance, and positive representation of neurodivergent individuals. Here are some examples:

IDENTITY-FIRST LANGUAGE:

Many neurodivergent individuals prefer identity-first language, which puts their neurodivergence at the forefront of their identity. For example:

"Autistic person" instead of "person with autism"

"ADHD person" instead of "person with ADHD"

RATHER THAN
'PEOPLE
WITH AUTISM'

PLEASE CHOOSE...

AUTISTIC
PERSON

RATHER THAN
'PEOPLE
WITH ADHD'

PLEASE CHOOSE...

ADHD
PERSON

AVOIDING NEGATIVE TERMINOLOGY:

Language develops and changes over time, terms that were once considered to be appropriate may not be appropriate today.

language used by and for the neurodivergent community refrains from using language that implies a deficit or a problem

For example: Use "neurodivergent" instead of "disordered"

RATHER THAN
'DISORDER'

PLEASE CHOOSE...

NEURODIVERGENT

RATHER THAN
'DIFFERENTLY
ABLED'

PLEASE CHOOSE...

DISABILITY

RATHER THAN
'HIGH OR LOW
FUNCTIONING'

PLEASE CHOOSE...

VARIABLE
SUPPORT NEEDS

FOCUS ON POSITIVE TERMINOLOGY:

neuro-affirming language focuses on positive descriptors to emphasize strengths and positive traits.

For example: "Detail-oriented" instead of "obsessive"

RATHER THAN
'ARGUMENTATIVE'

PLEASE CHOOSE...

**ANALYTICAL
THINKER
QUESTIONS
LOGIC**

RATHER THAN
'RIGID'

PLEASE CHOOSE...

**VALUES
CONSISTENCY &
STRUCTURE**

RATHER THAN
'INFLEXIBLE'

PLEASE CHOOSE...

**VALUES
PREDICTABILITY
& CONSISTENCY**

EMPOWERING LANGUAGE:

Use language that empowers and validates the experiences of neurodivergent individuals - No tragedy language. For example:

"Autistic advocate" instead of "autism sufferer"

"Living with ADHD" instead of "struggling with ADHD"

Neutral and Objective Descriptions: Describe behaviors and characteristics neutrally without judgment. For example:

"Stims by hand-flapping" instead of "exhibits abnormal repetitive behavior"

"Communicates non-verbally" instead of "non-verbal"

RATHER THAN
**'REPETITIVE
BEHAVIOR'**

PLEASE CHOOSE...

**STIMS BY
FLAPPING
HANDS**

RATHER THAN
'NON-VERBAL'

PLEASE CHOOSE...

**COMMUNICATES
NON-VERBALLY**

RATHER THAN
**'CANNOT
SPEAK'**

PLEASE CHOOSE...

**COMMUNICATES
USING AAC**

AVOID

Language that implies a neurotypical standard as the benchmark

The issue with statements that imply a neurotypical standard — often called **norm-referenced phrasing** — is not that they describe behaviour. It's that they quietly define one way of being as **"correct"** and position other ways as **deficits**.

"Responds appropriately"
"As expected"
"Age-appropriate behaviour"
"Normal social interaction"

"Failed to comply with instructions"
"Demonstrates typical behaviour"
"On par with peers"

When we measure a child against a neurotypical benchmark neurodivergent communication, processing, and regulation differences are frames as **deficit**. This can unintentionally **pathologise natural neurological variation**. Norm-referenced language subtly implies there is a:

right way to respond

typical way to process

correct emotional expression

For example:

"Does not respond appropriately to instructions"

implies wrong doing.

vs

"Responds differently when overwhelmed."

acknowledges context

AVOID

Comparison to an the "average" child

Frame difference as impairment

Focus on behaviour outcome rather than nervous system state

Centre adult expectation over child experience

WHY

We focus on nervous system state over behaviour outcome

It Can Undermine Autonomy

Statements like:

"Behaved as expected"

"Demonstrated good social skills"

Can prioritise **conformity over safety and authenticity.**

Neuro-affirming practice prioritises:

- Regulation First
- Sense of Safety
- Self-advocacy
- Autonomy

Shifting the Lens, instead of asking:
"Is this behaviour appropriate?"

We ask:

"What is this behaviour communicating?"

"What support would increase regulation?"

"What conditions help this child access?"

Negatively Influences & Create Stigma

The language used in reports shapes:

How teachers perceive the child

How support is designed

How peers view them

How the child sees themselves

When language implies

"not meeting the norm," expectations can lower and stigma can grow.

IEP / Assessment Report

Defiant
Aggressive
Non-compliant
Disrespectful
Rigid
Oppositional
Oppositional

Regulation
Strength
Understanding
Collaboration
Safety
Individual strengths

Psychologist's Report

Deficits in Social Reciprocity

Impairment in Emotional Regulation

Poor Adaptive Functioning

Below Expected Level

Limited Frustration Tolerance

Rigid and Inflexible Thinking

Attention-Seeking Behavior

WHY

We focus on nervous system state over behaviour outcome

Impact Inclusion Progress

Norm-referenced and deficit-based language can unintentionally influence how additional support settings, including special classes, are perceived. When **reports focus heavily on behavioural concerns without contextualising regulation and nervous system responses**, it can heighten anxiety for staff and decision-makers. This may contribute to hesitancy in developing /extending inclusive provision in their school.



Impact Support Staff Decision Making

Deficit-focused language can unintentionally amplify fear around behavioural needs, educators & support staff themselves can operate in a state of stress, where fight-or-flight responses reduce their capacity to respond with empathy and can prioritise **conformity over safety and authenticity**.

Language that centres understanding, regulation, collaboration and support helps create conditions where both students and staff feel safe, confident, and equipped to engage constructively.

Shifting to regulation-informed language supports calmer systems, safer classrooms, and more confident inclusive practice.



ADOPTING NEURO-AFFIRMING LANGUAGE SIGNALS A PARADIGM SHIFT IN EDUCATION



PETROL - OUTDATED



EV - FUTURE FOCUSED

Using neuro-affirming language represents a paradigm shift in how we understand and support neurodivergent students.”

For too long, deficit-based and fear-driven language in professional reports has unintentionally reinforced stigma around students with additional needs. The words used in assessments, incident reports, and IEPs shape how a child is understood — by staff, peers, families, and most importantly by the child themselves.

The shift from deficit-based language to strengths-based understanding is not about ignoring challenges; it is about recognising that regulation, safety, and autonomy underpin learning. When language moves from managing behavior to understanding regulation, we move from control to inclusion. Documentation that reflects this affirms identity rather than diminishing it. Every child deserves to see themselves described with dignity, possibility, and belonging, and **every IEP should empower** neurodivergent students to recognise their strengths, feel safe in their differences, and experience school as a place where they truly belong.

Moving from deficit-based, behavior-management language to regulation-informed, strengths-based language is a fundamental shift in how we understand neurodivergence

It represents a move from Compliance → Collaboration, Control → Co-regulation, Managing → Understanding.





SENSORY WELLBEING

Some Examples of a Regulated Nervous System in Action....



Engaged and Attentive -

Is present and able to engage in learning when feeling safe, supported, and regulated.



Following Routines -

Moves between activities when given predictability and preparation.

Body Movements -

Shows body movements that reflect comfort and regulation.

Cognitive Regulation

Behavioural Regulation

Self-Soothing

Uses strategies (breathing, movement, sensory tools) to support regulation when needed.

Emotional Responses -

Expresses feelings in ways that reflect their internal state.

Calm and Content -

Appears relaxed when their nervous system feels safe.

Focused and Attentive -

when feeling safe and regulated

Problem-Solving -

Attempts to work through challenges when feeling supported

Processing Information -

Understands and responds using communication styles that is authentic to their communication profile.



Social Regulation

Emotional Regulation

Interacting Socially -

responding to others in ways that reflects their communication style when feeling safe.

Flexible Thinking -

Navigates changes with support and predictability.

Expresses Needs Clearly -

Uses words, gestures, or communication tools that feel accessible



BLAME



UNDERSTANDING

**NEURO-
AFFIRMING
LENS**



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FROM BLAME TO UNDERSTANDING - SIMPLY SHIFT THE LENS

"HE'S BEING DEFIANT"



**"HE'S FEELING
OVERWHELMED &
PROTECTING HIMSELF."**

**"THEY WONT
EVEN TRY"**



**"MAY NOT HAVE THE
EXECUTIVE FUNCTION
SKILLS TO
PERFORM THE TASK"**



**"SHE JUST
WANTS CONTROL"**



**"SHE NEEDS A SENSE OF
SAFETY AND AUTONOMY"**

**"THE ATTENTION
SEEKING BEHAVIOR
IS DISRUPTIVE"**



**"HE IS LOOKING FOR
EITHER CONNECTION,
REASSURANCE
OR SAFETY"**

**"SHE IS BEING
DIFFICULT"**



**"SHE IS STRUGGLING
IN THE ENVIRONMENT
RIGHT NOW"**

UNDERSTANDING

**"THEY STRUGGLE
TO FOCUS"**



**"ATTENTION SHIFTS
WHEN STRESSED, MAY
NEED REGULATION
BEFORE LEARNING"**

**THERE MUST BE
CONSEQUENCES."**



**"THERE MUST BE
UNDERSTANDING
FOLLOWED BY
PROBLEM-SOLVING."**

**NEURO-
AFFIRMING
LENS**



FROM BLAME TO UNDERSTANDING - SIMPLY SHIFT THE LENS

**"BECAME AGGRESSIVE
TOWARDS STAFF."**



**"HE'S FEELING
OVERWHELMED &
PROTECTING
HIMSELF."**

**OR
ENTERED A FIGHT
RESPONSE DURING
A MOMENT OF
HEIGHTENED STRESS.**



**HE LOST CONTROL
& HIT ANOTHER
STUDENT"**



**"SHE EXPERIENCED
SIGNIFICANT
DISTRESS &
ENTERED A FIGHT
RESPONSE.
AND REACTED
PHYSICALLY"**

**"SHE'S TRYING
TO MANIPULATE
THE SITUATION"**



**"SHE'S
COMMUNICATING
DISTRESS IN THE
ONLY WAY SHE CAN
RIGHT NOW."**



UNDERSTANDING

**SHE WAS RUDE
USING
INAPPROPRIATE
LANGUAGE"**



**FEELINGS OF
HEIGHTENED STRESS
WAS EXPRESSED
THROUGH REACTIVE
LANGUAGE TOWARDS
THE TEACHER."**

**"SHE OVER
REACTS"**



**"SHE HAS A LOWER
STRESS THRESHOLD
AT THIS MOMENT."**



**NEURO-
AFFIRMING
LENS**



**"THEY'RE REFUSING
TO COOPERATE
ON PURPOSE"**



**"THE DEMAND FEELS
TOO BIG FOR THEIR
NERVOUS SYSTEM
RIGHT NOW."**



LANGUAGE GUIDE

STRENGTH BASED



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DEFICIT TO STRENGTH BASED RE FRAMING - SIMPLY SHIFT THE LENS

DISRUPTIVE IN CLASS

➡ **EXPRESSING AN UNMET NEED OR OVERWHELM**

NOT FOLLOWING INSTRUCTIONS

➡ **NEEDS CLARITY, PROCESSING TIME, OR REDUCED DEMAND**

AVOIDANT

➡ **PROTECTING NERVOUS SYSTEM FROM OVERLOAD**

EASILY DISTRACTED

➡ **HIGHLY AWARE OF ENVIRONMENT**

DOESN'T APPLY THEMSELVES

➡ **MOTIVATED BY MEANING AND CONNECTION**

TOO SENSITIVE

➡ **DEEPLY PERCEPTIVE AND EMOTIONALLY AWARE**

RIGID ABOUT ROUTINES

➡ **FEELS SAFEST WITH PREDICTABILITY**

OVERREACTS TO SMALL THINGS

➡ **EXPERIENCES STRESS INTENSELY AND GENUINELY**

ATTENTION-SEEKING

➡ **SEEKING CONNECTION OR CO-REGULATION**

DIFFICULT BEHAVIOR

➡ **COMMUNICATING STRESS THROUGH BEHAVIOR**

DEFICIT TO STRENGTH BASED RE FRAMING - SIMPLY SHIFT THE LENS

ARGUMENTATIVE

➡ **ANALYTICAL THINKER. QUESTIONS LOGIC**

OPPOSITIONAL

➡ **PROTECTING NERVOUS SYSTEM FROM OVERWHELM**

DEFIANT

➡ **STRONG SENSE OF AUTONOMY**

HYPERACTIVE

➡ **ENERGETIC AND ENTHUSIASTIC**

OBSESSIVE

➡ **DEEPLY FOCUSED. PASSIONATE ABOUT INTERESTS**

INFLEXIBLE

➡ **VALUES PREDICTABILITY & CONSISTENCY**

CONTROLLING

➡ **NEEDS PREDICTABILITY AND AGENCY**

RIGID

➡ **VALUES CONSISTENCY AND STRUCTURE**

MANIPULATIVE

➡ **USING AVAILABLE STRATEGIES TO GET NEEDS MET**

DRAMATIC

➡ **EXPRESSIVE AND EMOTIONALLY HONEST**

ref: Greene, R. W. (2008). The Explosive Child.
Delahooke, M. (2019). Beyond Behaviors.
National Council for Special Education (NCSE)

A NEURO-AFFIRMING APPROACH: SECTION 4

PUBLICATIONS



PODCAST



TRAINING



**RECOMMENDED
RESOURCES**

**NEURO- AFFIRMING
BEST PRACTICES**

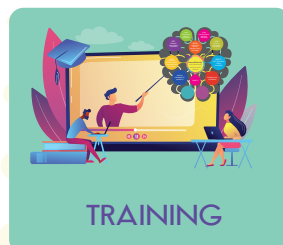


REGULATION TOOLS

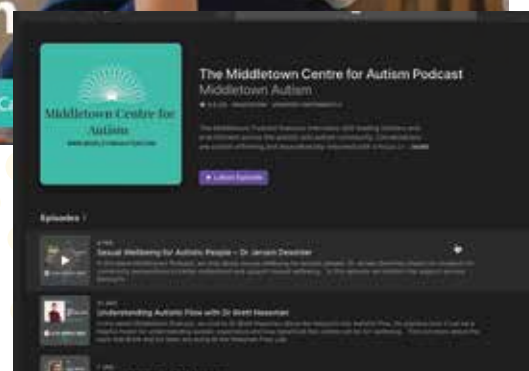
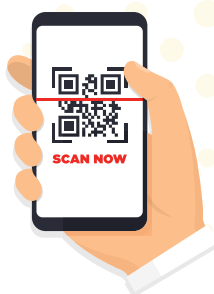
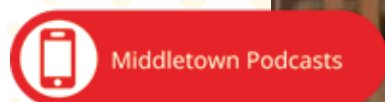
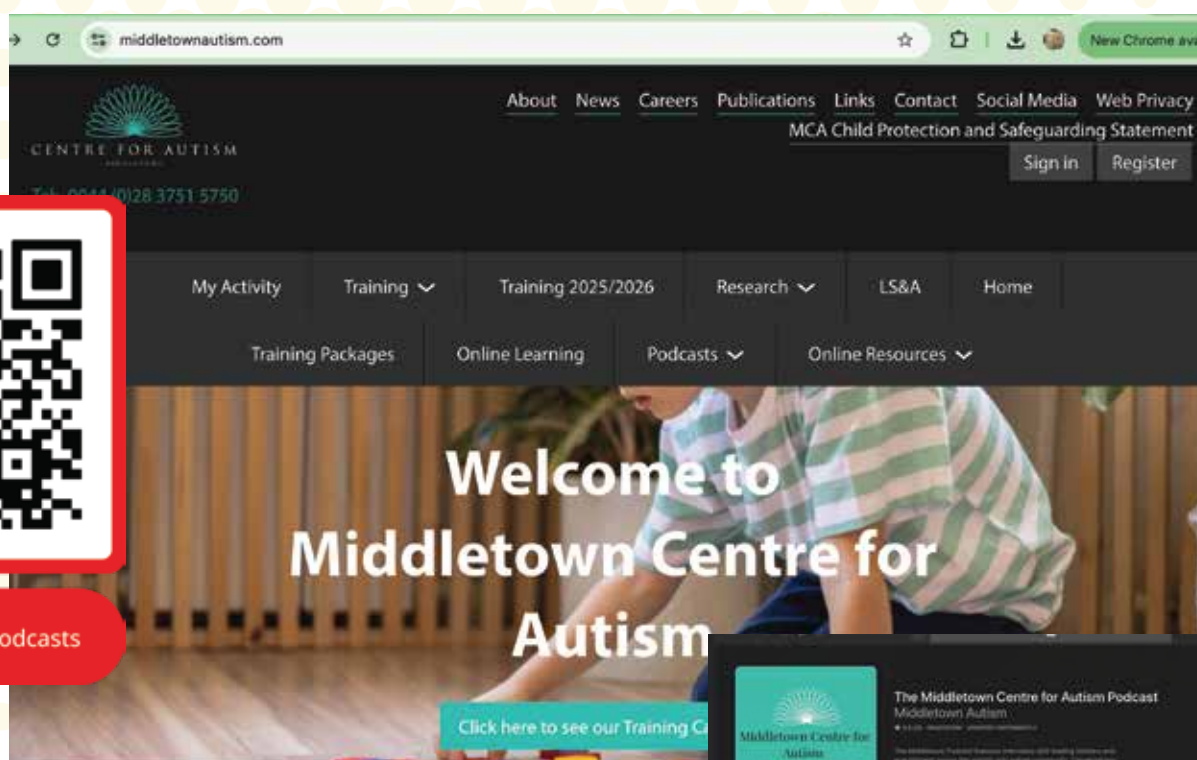


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RECOMMENDED SOURCES FOR NEURO- AFFIRMING BEST PRACTICES



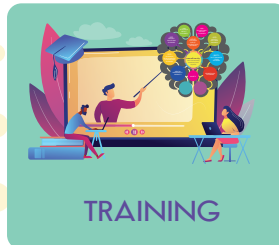
The Middletown Centre for Autism website is available resource for schools committed to inclusive practice. With free podcasts, training opportunities, & evidence informed guidance tailored to educators, it provides practical support that can enhance understanding, strengthen relationships, and improve outcomes for autistic and neurodivergent students.



RECOMMENDED SOURCES FOR NEURO-AFFIRMING BEST PRACTICES

**IRELAND'S AUTISM CHARITY**

AsIAm is Ireland's national autism charity, working to create a society in which autistic people are accepted, understood, and supported to thrive. Their core goal is to promote inclusion, equality, and access to opportunities across education, employment, and community life. AsIAm provides a wide range of trusted resources, including published research, policy guidance, training programs for schools and organisations, and practical supports such as visual resources and toolkits. Their work is grounded in autistic voice and evidence-based practice, making them a reliable and valuable source of information for educators and families alike.



TRAINING



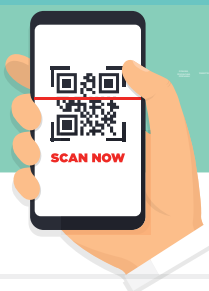
PODCAST



PUBLICATION



ASIAM RESOURCE LIBRARY



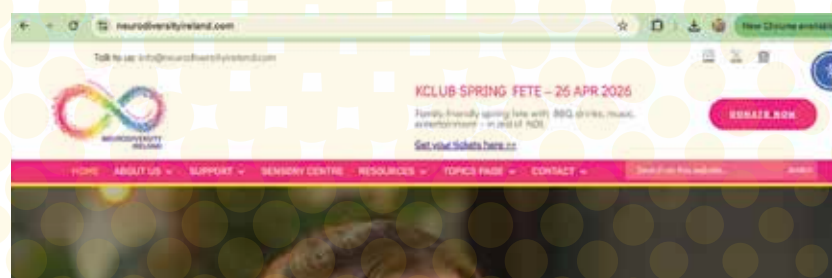
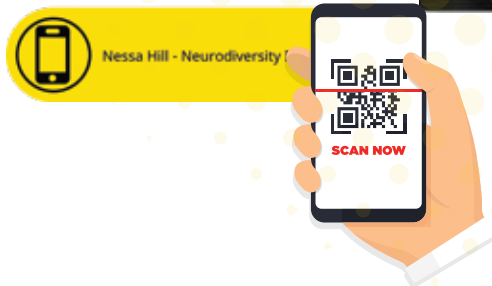
- ➔ **Research & Policy**
Published research reports on autism in Ireland
- ➔ **Training & Professional Learning**
Autism awareness training for schools
Whole-school inclusion programs
Webinars and online learning modules
CPD opportunities for educators
- ➔ **Education Supports**
Guidance for inclusive classrooms
Practical strategies for supporting autistic students
- ➔ **Practical Tools & Visual Supports**
Visual schedules and communication supports

RECOMMENDED SOURCES FOR NEURO-AFFIRMING BEST PRACTICES



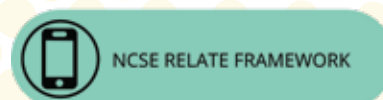
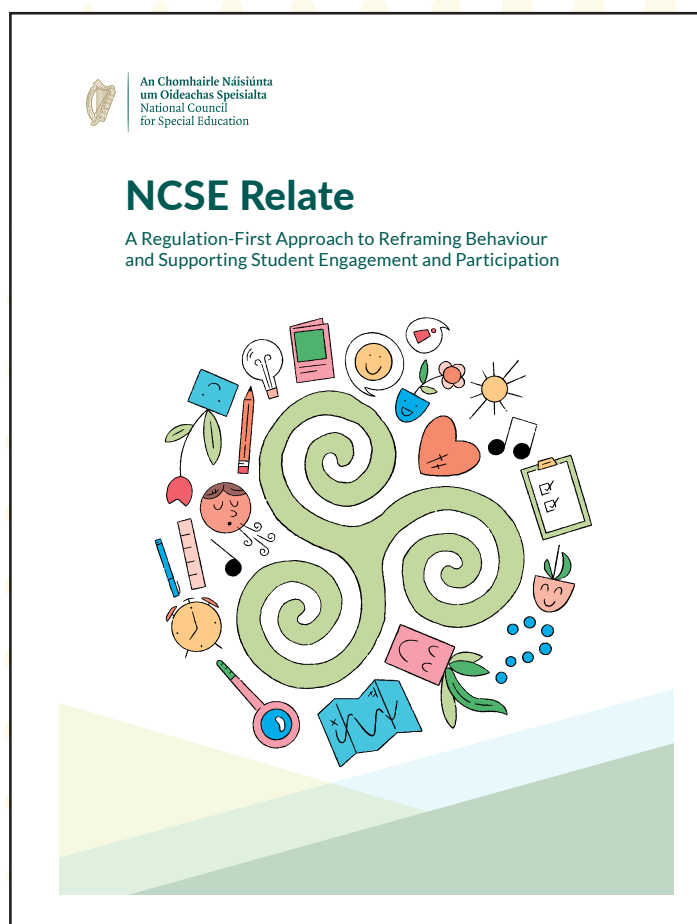
Neurodiversity Ireland is an organisation focused on promoting understanding, acceptance, and inclusion of neurodivergent people across Irish society. Grounded in the neurodiversity paradigm, it recognises neurological differences such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia and dyspraxia as natural variations of human development rather than deficits to be fixed. Neurodiversity Ireland provides advocacy, awareness initiatives, educational resources, and community engagement aimed at supporting schools, workplaces, and public services to adopt inclusive, strengths-based approaches. Their work centers lived experience and promotes environments where neurodivergent individuals can thrive.

<https://neurodiversityireland.com/>



RECOMMENDED SOURCES FOR NEURO-AFFIRMING BEST PRACTICES

A Regulation-First Approach to Reframing Behavior and Supporting Student Engagement and Participation



Supporting regulation & relationships in the classroom is central to inclusive education. The NCSE RELATE guidance offers practical, evidence informed strategies to help staff understand behavior through a regulation & relationship lens rather than a compliance lens. It provides clear, accessible tools that can strengthen connection, reduce escalation, & support positive outcomes for all students — particularly

those who experience stress responses in learning environments. Taking time to engage with this resource can enhance consistency across the school and support a calmer, more responsive classroom culture.

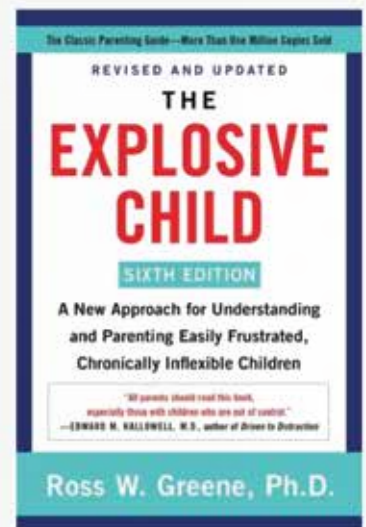
RECOMMENDED SOURCES FOR NEURO-AFFIRMING BEST PRACTICES



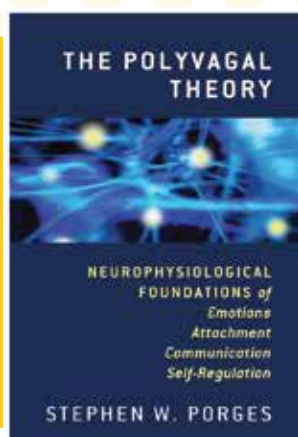
Dr. Ross Greene is a clinical psychologist & the originator of the Collaborative & Proactive Solutions (CPS) approach. His work re frames challenging behavior as a signal of stress and unmet needs rather than willful defiance, emphasizing that “kids do well if they can.” Through his writing and the organisation Lives in the Balance, he supports schools and families to build collaborative, regulation-focused, and relationship centered environments.



DR ROSS GREENE



RECOMMENDED

THE POLYVAGAL THEORY
BY STEPHEN W. PORGES

SENSORY REGULATION PLANNING



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SUPERCALM TOP 5 REGULATION STATIONS

Sensory Wellbeing Solutions for Children

SUPERCLIMBER - Transverse, Horizontal Walk Wall. Highly Regulating Proprioceptive Input Movement Station

1



An effective whole-body regulation tool for schools. By engaging both upper and lower body coordination, it supports brain connectivity, strengthens cognitive and motor development, and encourages rich sensory exploration.

2

SUPER STAR GYM - Punch Pad & Resistance Band Combination Wall



Deep Pressure Proprioceptive Regulation Station.
Strengthens Coordination, Balance, Motor Skills
Muscular System.



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3

SUPERPATHWAY - Universal Sensory Floor Pathway with Wall Stations: Alerting, Organising, Calming Movement Pathway



Monkey Movement Wall Ladder.
Ideal for Calming Deep Pressure

Spinning Wheel Range: Animal Walks,
Core Building or Yoga Movements

4



5

Regulation Tools
that Help Engage
a Student by
Offering choice
& Autonomy.





SUPERCALM

Sensory Wellbeing Solutions for Children

OUR MISSION

To design and deliver innovative sensory regulation tools, training and technology that empowers educators to create more tolerable inclusive learning environments. By combining evidence based practice with practical design and digital accessibility, SUPERCALM aims to supports schools in building the skills, awareness, and confidence needed to nurture every childs' potential and promote genuine neuro-affirming education

OUR MOVEMENT
BREAKS WORK
WONDERS
for everybody



supercalmsensoryproducts.com

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