

NEURODIVERSITY IN THE EARLY YEARS

Neurodiversity & Ableism Reflection Tool

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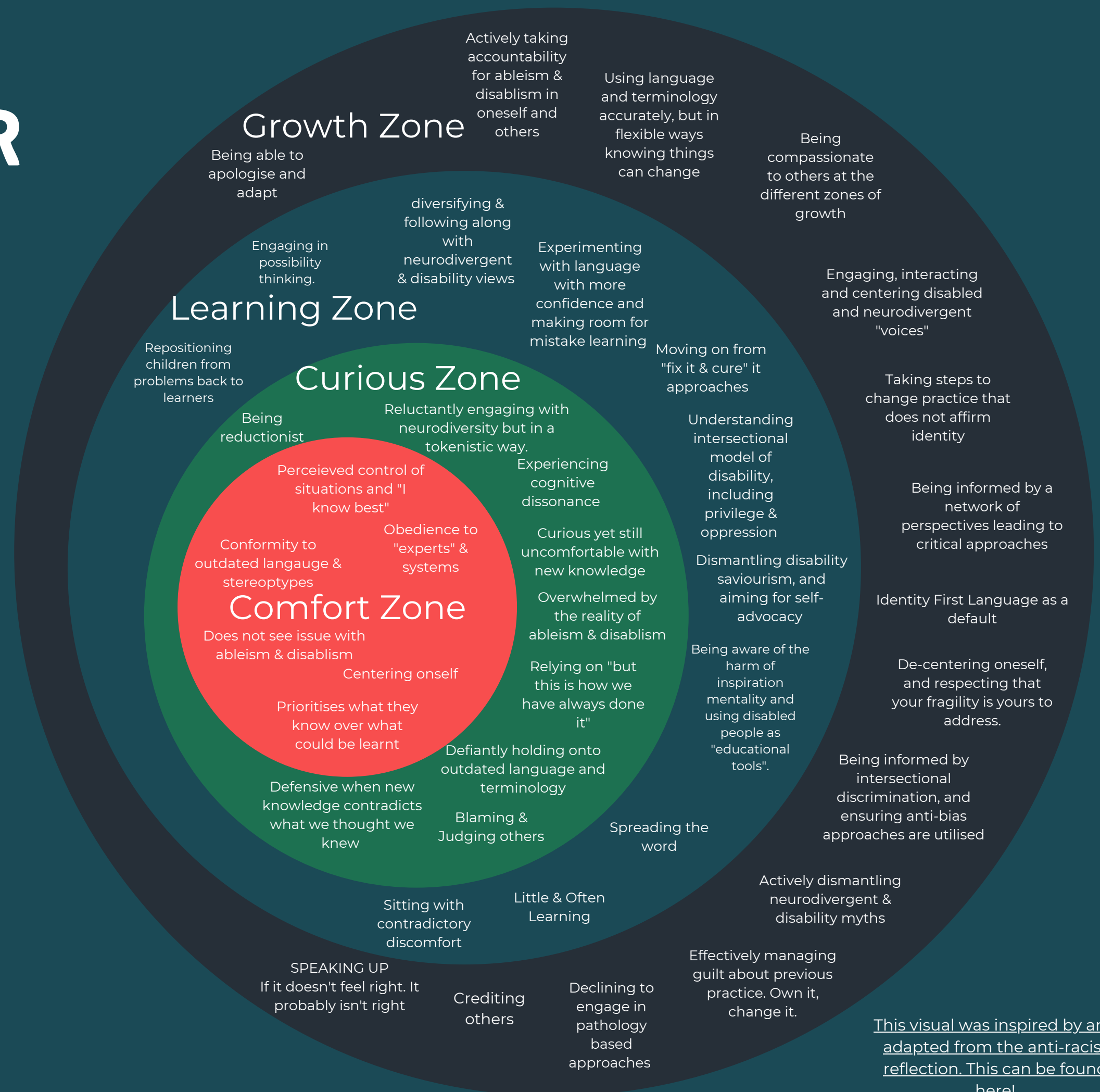
GLOSSARY



Neurodiversity	Neurodiversity refers to the natural and diverse variation of human minds, and the acknowledgment that all minds and bodies have equal value. neurodiversity refers to the collective experience of human difference.	"Our setting uses a range of teaching strategies to ensure the neurodiversity of the group is accommodated"
Neurotypical	Neurotypical refers to individuals whose development conforms to the socially constructed ideas of 'normal'. They usually form part of the neuromajority and considered the right way to be.	"The child appears neurotypical as they are meeting their typical milestones"
Neurodivergent	Neurodivergent refers to those individuals whose development diverges from neurotypicalism. For example, being autistic or dyslexic. For young children, you might refer to emergent neurodivergence if they have not yet but likely to receive a diagnosis.	"The child has differences in their development, and is not meeting typical milestones. They may have a form of neurodivergence although I am not quite sure yet"
Ableism	Ableism refers to the systemic belief that it is better to not be disabled than to be disabled. It is the favouring of able bodies and typical minds, and engaging in a society that privileges those who appear most typical or conforming to ideas of normalcy.	"We expect all children to sit still and provide eye contact regardless of their developmental differences"
Neurotype	Neurotype refers to a type of neurodivergence. For example, ADHD neurotype.	"The child's neurotype is autism"
Special Educational Needs	Special Educational Needs refers to a government informed term to identify those who are not yet meeting typical and age related expectations. Neurodivergent and disabled children are subjected to this terminology even if they have lifelong developmental differences.	"The child falls under the definition of SEN"

MOVING BEYOND OUR COMFORT ZONES...

Cathy Nutbrown reminds us that inclusion is a state of becoming rather than a state of being (2016). It is important to recognise that neurodiversity affirming practice is a journey that requires us to move beyond our comfort zones, and to think anew about how we approach the celebration, inclusion and support of neurodivergent and disabled children. Take a look at the zones and think about where you currently feel you are.



[This visual was inspired by and adapted from the anti-racist reflection. This can be found here!](#)

TAKING THE STEPS

NEURODIVERSITY INFORMED

If we view neurodiversity as a journey, it is important that we first spend time becoming informed about the concept, movement and approach. This will take time, and will involve lots of new learning and ways of being.

NEURODIVERSITY AFFIRMING

Neurodiversity-affirming practices emerge from us becoming more informed about developmental differences. In our everyday beliefs and practices we affirm, empower and embrace difference, whilst supporting and adapting to address areas of need.





NEURODIVERSITY (THE CURIOUS ZONE)



All educators understand what neurodiversity is, and why this paradigm is essential to equity and inclusion. As a team, they are able to define and describe ableism including examples, and why this is harmful. In addition, they understand how intersecting factors such as race, gender and socio-economic background can create further inequality. Educators are actively developing their language and terminology to be neurodiversity-affirming. They are also beginning to translate this knowledge into practice.

Educators can explain what neurodiversity is and why it is a beneficial approach. They can provide clear examples of ableism and disablism and understand the harmful impact.

Educators actively use a celebratory framework and view all children's development through strengths, interests, traits, differences and needs.

Observational attention is given to all children, and play, learning, and intervention goals aim to affirm children's differences and support their areas of need.

Educators understand the diversity within the development and use adaptive practices to include all children.

Educators show a clear understanding of ableist language and are able to identify and refer to neurodiversity-informed terminology

Educatoes are aware of the different intersectional identities of children, and how this can lead to multiple discrimination, such as racism and classism

Book training led or co-produced by neurodivergent & disabled people. Be cautious of those using neurodiversity as a tagline, but then promote ableist ideas.

Follow social media accounts and researchers who advocate for the neurodiversity paradigm.

Use a celebratory framework to talk about children consisting of strengths, interests, traits, differences and needs.

Host virtual or face to face workshops with families to share your knowledge



NEURODIVERSITY (THE LEARNING ZONE)



All educators understand the value of play-rich foundations and targeted and specialist provision. They can use their knowledge of the child to implement differentiated support, and specialist advice is integrated and personalised to enrich the child's everyday experiences. The setting is actively deconstructing approaches rooted in the deficit approach and building up new toolkits of teaching that embrace child-led and family centred educare.

Educators are building play-rich foundations for children and appropriate targeted and specialist provision. They integrate intervention techniques into the child's everyday experiences.

Educators do not rely on ages + stages for development, but can appropriately explain development profiles that do not infantilise or undermine children's neurodivergence or disability.

The setting uses multi-modal approaches for communication and values different communication identities, including non-speaking, minimally speaking and neurodivergent social skills

Play goals are built into the child's everyday experiences within the setting and at home. They are linked to special interests and are child-led.

Behaviour management is not used within the setting. Co-regulation, sensory safety and neuro-informed approaches are adopted.

Educators view intervention as a process to support all children with understanding difference and building connections.

Use the Play-Rich foundations approach to build a toolkit of teaching strategies

Explore neurodiversity-affirming intervention programmes and approaches.

Review parent partnership policies, and aim for co-production and collaboration

Devise a CPD plan for each educator



NEURODIVERSITY (THE GROWTH ZONE)

Educators have taken the necessary actions to embrace a neurodiversity-affirming paradigm. They understand the harm of a deficit approach and are informed by up-to-date research that includes neurodivergent and disabled voices. They have rejected practices that are rooted in ableism, and actively seek to expand their understanding of diverse development including ways to cultivate strengths and needs. They work collaboratively and sensitively with families to empower and build strong partnerships between the home and the setting.

Staff are informed by research that tackles ableism and disablism. They show a clear awareness of neurodivergent myths, and use research that dismantles the deficit approach

The setting ensures that the use of intervention adheres to a neurodiversity-affirming paradigm. Interventions that train children in masking, or mimicking of neurotypical skills are not used or are adapted to meet the needs of children.

Compliance based approaches are not used within settings. Staff use self-advocacy, choice and an ethics of care when supporting young children.

Play goals do not force compliance or masking of neurotypical skills

Settings work fully in collaboration with the child and family to ensure a citizenship approach. Both are instrumental in decision making.

The setting fully adapts to divergent needs, including non-speaking children, and those with physical disabilities.

Use the SHARE framework for play goals

Working alongside local authorities and services to dismantle ableism

Divergent Pathways of Development are used alongside any typical development documents

Pledge made to access and attend representative training, projects and panels.

SHARE GOALS



Student-Led

Holistic

Adaptable

Recognises & Affirms Identity

Engagement and wellbeing focused



Goal Aspect	What it means	Traditional Goal	Strength's based goal
Student-Led	Goals should meet children where they are and will be unique to their developmental profile. Remember that normative milestone documents don't necessarily reflect neurodivergent or disabled children so that milestones can lead us down the wrong path. Focus on what is meaningful and needed for that particular child.	To introduce new toys into play, and child to engage away from special interest for up to 60 seconds. (eliminate restricted and repetitive play)	To build upon special interest in diggers including additional provocations, and to engage in parallel play.
Holistic	When deciding on what you want to work towards, do consider how this relates to all domains of development. Goals rarely benefit one aspect of learning, and too much specificity can actually narrow opportunities to learn.	Child to sit still during circle time for up to 2 minutes.	Identify key indicators for their engagement, and plan to incorporate these into circle time, for example, movement based and active.
Adaptable	There can be a tendency with traditional goals to stick with them even when we know they are not working. Follow the child's lead and don't be afraid to go off on a tangent. Goals that are delivered through intervention programmes must be translatable to everyday experiences.	To pay attention to the novelty items in a bucket for up to 90 seconds, three times a week.	To identify attention profile, and to use attention grabbers to cue transitions changes or to gain attention.
Recognises & Affirms Identity	Goals mustn't focus on training a child to behave or learn neurotypically. Explore the different traits and consider how you might affirm the child's ways of being.	To encourage face to face eye contact for up to 30 seconds during interactions.	To acknowledge main ways of communicating, and to mirror this during interactions and play.
Engagement & wellbeing focused	A sense of wellbeing, belonging and engagement are critical for our life long learning. Goals should promote enjoyment, pleasure, fun and joy. They should be rooted in what the child is motivated to do, rather than what they have to do.	Child must communicate play visual to gain access choice of play.	To follow child's lead in play, and to enable uninterrupted opportunities for play, with sensitive scaffolding.