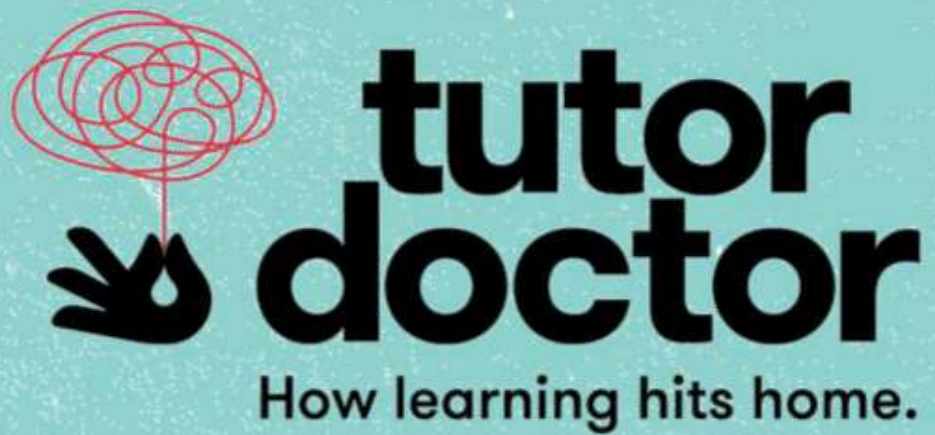




UNDERSTANDING NEURODIVERGENCE

A starting point for families

A guide from Tutor Doctor Santa Monica

Maybe a teacher used the word. Maybe it came up after an assessment, or perhaps you've come across it while searching for answers about your child's learning. Whatever brought you here, you're not alone. Neurodivergence can sound intimidating, but this guide will help you understand the term, what it might mean for your child, and what you may want to do next.

WHAT NEURODIVERGENT MEANS

"Neurodivergent" is an umbrella term that means a brain that works differently from what's considered "typical." It describes differences in how the brain performs functions like processing information, paying attention, handling sensory input, or learning. It isn't a medical term with a strict definition, and it isn't a measure of intelligence or potential.

Every neurodivergent person has their own combination of strengths and areas where they may need additional support. A neurodivergent child doesn't need to be "fixed." They simply learn, think, or experience the world differently. Understanding those differences helps you provide the right support, strategies, and environment for them to succeed.



COMMON NEURODIVERGENT CONDITIONS AND PROFILES

Neurodivergence isn't a diagnosis itself. It's a broad term used to describe people who have one or more diagnosed conditions or profiles that affect how the brain functions. Because these conditions often overlap, it's not uncommon for someone to have more than one diagnosis or neurodivergent profile. Here are some of the most common conditions and profiles that fall under the neurodivergent umbrella, along with a plain-language explanation of each. These descriptions are intended to help you understand the basics and are not comprehensive. Each condition and profile is complex, and every person has their own unique combination of strengths, challenges, and support needs.

1 ADHD (Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder)

ADHD affects attention, impulse control, and activity level. While many people think of ADHD as an inability to pay attention, it's often more accurate to think of it as difficulty regulating attention and controlling where it goes. The way ADHD presents varies from person to person and can look different depending on the situation. Executive functioning skills, such as getting started, staying organized, and managing time, are common areas where people with ADHD may need additional support.

2 Dyslexia

Dyslexia is a difference in how the brain processes written language, particularly decoding—connecting letters to their sounds. Because of this difference, dyslexia commonly affects reading and spelling, but it has nothing to do with intelligence or effort. Dyslexic students often find the reading and writing required in school to be a barrier, but there are many strategies that can help them succeed while drawing on their stronger verbal language skills.

3 Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Autism affects social communication, sensory processing, and how a person experiences and interacts with the world around them. No two autistic people are exactly alike, which is why autism is described as a spectrum. Some people may prefer routines, develop deep interests in specific topics, or experience sounds, lights, textures, and other sensory input differently. Depending on the person, these differences can sometimes make social situations, unexpected changes, or busy, noisy, or overstimulating environments more challenging to navigate.

4 Dyscalculia

Dyscalculia is a difference in how the brain understands and processes numbers and mathematical concepts. It commonly affects number sense—understanding quantities, patterns, and numerical relationships—as well as calculations and mathematical reasoning. It isn't simply "being bad at math." Students with dyscalculia may need additional support to develop effective mathematical problem-solving strategies. They often benefit from teaching approaches that make abstract mathematical concepts more concrete.

5 Dysgraphia

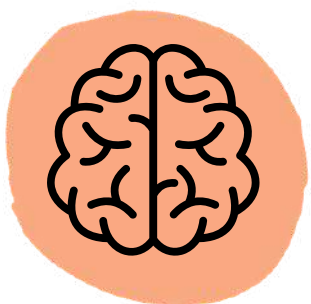
Dysgraphia is a difference in how the brain translates thoughts into writing and coordinates the hand to form letters. It's often thought of as being primarily about messy handwriting because that's the most visible challenge. But it can also affect the organization of ideas, writing fluently, and how written work is structured. Students with dysgraphia often know far more than they're able to demonstrate in writing, and the right supports can help them communicate their knowledge more effectively.



6 Twice-exceptional (2e)

Twice-exceptional (2e) describes students who are both gifted and neurodivergent. This learning profile can be difficult to identify because a child's strengths can sometimes make it harder to recognize their challenges, while their challenges can make it harder to recognize their strengths. The unique combination of exceptional talent and support needs creates a complex learning profile that often requires a highly individualized approach. 2e isn't a diagnosis. Rather, it's an identification that helps parents, teachers, and other support professionals better understand how to simultaneously provide enrichment opportunities and supports for their neurodivergence.

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS



Neurodivergence affects intelligence

Neurodivergence affects how a person learns, processes information, and experiences the world. It doesn't affect how intelligent they are. A person's challenges should never be mistaken for their potential.



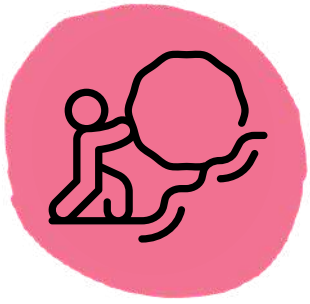
Neurodivergence is caused by a child's environment

Neurodivergence is a natural difference in how the brain develops and functions. These differences are present from before birth or early in life and aren't caused by environmental factors like parenting, screen time, diet, or lifestyle. However, a supportive environment can have significant positive effects on every neurodivergent child.



“Labelling” a child limits their potential

Many parents worry that putting a name to their child's needs will define their child or limit their potential. In reality, putting a name to those needs helps parents, teachers, doctors, and other support professionals develop a shared understanding and a common language for discussing how to best support the child. Rather than limiting opportunities, it helps ensure the child receives the support and accommodations they need to succeed.



Neurodivergence is just an excuse for a lack of motivation and effort

Many of the challenges associated with neurodivergence can look like a lack of motivation or effort. Difficulties getting started, maintaining focus, staying organized, or completing tasks are often mistaken for simply not trying or avoiding the work. In reality, many neurodivergent students put in more effort to achieve the same results as their peers, particularly when they don't yet have the strategies or supports that can help them be more successful.



Strengths-based learning is just about making children feel good

Strengths-based learning isn't about simply boosting confidence or overlooking a child's challenges. It recognizes that neurodivergent children often have genuine strengths such as pattern recognition, creativity, deep focus, problem-solving, or big-picture thinking. Developing these strengths and applying them to learning helps children understand how they think, what works well for them, and how they can use those strengths to support their needs. This understanding helps children become more effective, engaged, and successful learners

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WHAT YOU CAN DO NEXT

Learning that your child may be neurodivergent can feel overwhelming, but you don't need to have all the answers right away. Every child is different, and the best next steps depend on their unique strengths, challenges, and needs. Here are a few ways many families begin moving forward.



Build an understanding of your child's learning

"Neurodivergent" is a broad term and just a starting place. Learning more about how your child thinks, learns, and processes information can help you better understand both their strengths and the areas where they may need additional support. Assessments and cognitive learning profiles, such as MindPrint, can provide valuable insights into how your child thinks and learns. If you're wondering whether an assessment may be appropriate, see our guide [Is Something More Going On?](#)



Understand that support comes in many forms.

Depending on your child's needs, support may include school accommodations through an IEP or 504 Plan, targeted academic support, executive functioning coaching, therapy, or a learning environment that better matches how your child learns. Many children benefit from a combination of supports, and their support needs can change over time.



Find your people

Navigating your child's neurodivergence can feel isolating at times. Communities built for families with neurodivergent children—like Young Scholars Academy for gifted, 2e, and differently-wired learners—can remind you and your child that you're not alone while providing valuable support and resources. See our [Community Resources](#) page for more resources available in our community.



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Support your child's self-understanding

The way neurodivergence is talked about at home can influence how children understand themselves and their learning differences. Helping your child recognize both their strengths and the areas where they may need additional support can build confidence and encourage self-advocacy. As they grow, this understanding can help them develop strategies that work for them and approach challenges with greater confidence.

A FINAL THOUGHT

If you've recently learned that your child is neurodivergent, you may be wondering what comes next. While learning that your child is neurodivergent can bring many questions and emotions, it's important to remember that nothing about your child changed the day you received that information. They are still the same child they were before. What has changed is your understanding of how they think, learn, and experience the world.

Every neurodivergent child has their own unique strengths, challenges, and potential. With understanding, the right support, and opportunities to build on their strengths, they can continue to learn, grow, and thrive.



Tutor Doctor Santa Monica

When your child is ready for support that fits how they actually learn, we're here.

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This guide is for general information and isn't medical advice. Every child is different; a licensed professional can help you understand your child's specific profile and needs.



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