

NeuroDem

NeuroDem: Empowering Neurodivergent Youth to act as Changemakers for Inclusive Democratic Advocacy and Innovation

NeuroDem Learning Course

Project number: 2024-2-DE04-KA220-YOU-000279068

Verein zur sozialen und beruflichen



eucap

STIMMULI
for social change

GEYC

GROUP OF THE
EUROPEAN YOUTH
FOR CHANGE



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.



This work is licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>

Introduction	4
How to create accessible and inclusive workshops	5
Module 1 Understanding Neurodivergence	10
Content	10
Learning Objective	10
Overview	11
1 Introduction of Participants & Icebreaker	11
2 Understanding Neurodiversity: Theoretical Introduction	21
3 Signals of Overwhelming and Overload — Recognition and Response	24
Evaluation of the lesson - Reflection & Co-creation	29
Learning material	32
Module 2 Inclusive Communication and Interaction	33
Content	33
Learning Objective	33
Overview	33
1 Introduction: My communication style	34
2 Communication styles and barriers	35
3 Inclusive and discrimination-sensitive language	43
4 Creation of an inclusive working environment	49
Evaluation of the lesson	52
References	52
Learning material	54
Module 3 Strategies for cross-sectional collaboration	55
Learning Objective	55
Content	55
Overview	55
1 Introduction and reflection on cross-sectional collaboration	56
2 Stakeholder and systems mapping	59
3 Case-based analysis, co-design, and rapid prototyping	62
Evaluation of the lesson	67
References	69
Learning material	70
Module 4 Practical tools for neurodivergence advocacy and resilience	71
Learning Objective	71
Content	71
1 Settling in - Sensory Check	71
2 Icebreaker: Where do we stand?	72
3 To me, advocacy is...	74
4 Advocacy Canvas	75

5 The iceberg of change	76
6 The Power Map	77
7 My advocacy operating system	79
8 Storytelling for Advocacy	80
Evaluation of the lesson	81
Learning material	81
Module 5 Methods of Co-Creation	82
Learning Objective	82
Content	82
1 What is Co-Creation?	82
2 Co-creation in Practice	84
3 Co-Creation in Action	86
Evaluation of the lesson	87
Learning material	88

Introduction

This course provides youth workers with essential knowledge, practical tools, and effective strategies to better support neurodivergent young people, particularly those with autism and ADHD. It begins by strengthening awareness of neurodivergence, helping participants understand the diverse cognitive, social, and emotional needs of neurodivergent youth.

Building on this foundation, the course introduces inclusive communication approaches tailored to different needs. Participants will learn how to use accessible language, visual supports, and structured routines as well as more dynamic, task-oriented methods that are effective.

In addition, the course equips youth workers with advocacy skills to empower neurodivergent youth to actively participate in democratic processes and to develop resilience. It also explores innovative co-creation techniques that enable young people to take the lead in shaping initiatives and advocacy efforts that affect their lives.

Finally, the course emphasizes the importance of cross-sector collaboration. Participants will gain practical guidance on working with key stakeholders—including policymakers, NGOs, and special education professionals—to foster inclusive environments and strengthen advocacy for neurodivergent youth.

The training programme is delivered in a blended format, combining an international training bootcamp with webinars accessible to youth workers across the EU. This approach ensures both in-depth, collaborative learning experiences and flexible access to key content.

How to create accessible and inclusive workshops

Neurodivergent people can encounter a range of barriers in work and learning environments. For example, loud and busy surroundings may lead to sensory overload, while tasks that lack stimulation can result in restlessness, distraction, or boredom (CIPD, 2018). Removing such barriers is essential for enabling participation and inclusion, and many supportive measures are relatively simple and low-cost to implement.

Environmental factors play a central role. Managing noise levels through quiet workspaces, relaxation rooms, and allowing the use of headphones or earplugs can help prevent overstimulation and improve concentration. Lighting should also be considered carefully: bright or flickering lights can be disruptive, so natural light is preferable, and tools like sunglasses may help mitigate sensory stress. Physical setups and equipment should be clearly organised, with labelled materials and straightforward instructions to support orientation and reduce cognitive load. Opportunities for movement are equally important, as some individuals concentrate better when they can stand, move, or adopt flexible seating positions (Christner, 2024). In addition, stimming—repetitive movements or actions used for self-regulation—should be accepted and supported through tools such as fidget items, as these can enhance focus and emotional regulation, particularly in high-stimulus environments (Stille Stunde, 2025).

Communication is another critical dimension. Many neurodivergent people benefit from clear, direct, and structured language. Figurative expressions, metaphors, and unnecessary information can create confusion, whereas explicit instructions improve understanding and task execution. Alongside verbal communication, alternative and non-verbal methods—such as symbols, visual supports, or digital tools—should be

incorporated to accommodate diverse communication preferences (Broome, 2024; Stille Stunde, 2025).

Accessible working materials are essential for inclusive communication. Written documents should follow a clear and logical structure, using headings, short paragraphs, bullet points, and summaries to aid comprehension. Visual elements such as symbols can further support understanding. In terms of design, simple sans serif fonts (e.g. Arial, Calibri, Verdana) and consistent, non-distracting colour schemes are recommended. Overly long texts, bright colours, and complex visual elements should be avoided, as they may be perceived as overwhelming (Broome, 2024).

Inclusive methods also require careful consideration. In presentations, combining multiple communication channels—such as spoken explanations, written text, and visual aids—helps address different processing styles. Providing materials in advance or afterwards, and sharing additional resources, can further support accessibility (Broome, 2024). Similarly, websites and digital learning content should be designed with simplicity, clarity, and flexibility in mind. Complex navigation, excessive animations, auto-playing media, and rigid time constraints can create barriers. Instead, accessible design should include intuitive navigation, high-contrast text, adjustable settings (e.g. font size, colours), and compatibility with different input methods. Where animations are used, users should be able to disable them, and content should be available in multiple formats, including easy-to-understand language (ESN, 2020; Netz-Barrierefrei, 2023; WCAG Blog, 2025).

Group work presents particular challenges and requires inclusive structuring. Clear expectations, defined roles, and transparent time

management can support collaboration. Flexibility is also important: participants should have options regarding group composition and, where appropriate, the possibility to work individually. Adequate support from facilitators is necessary when conflicts arise, and the cognitive and emotional demands of group work should be acknowledged. Providing sufficient time and regular breaks helps ensure that all participants can engage meaningfully (Dwyer et al., 2022; Salvatore et al., 2024).

Overall, accessibility for neurodivergent people involves thoughtful adjustments across environments, communication, materials, and methods. These measures not only reduce barriers but also create more inclusive and effective learning and working conditions for everyone.

Throughout the session, your role is not to lead participants toward “correct answers,” but to create conditions where different ways of thinking and expressing are valid.

Facilitation principles

- Ensure predictability → clearly preview what comes next and guide participants through each step of the session
- Offer choice in participation → provide multiple ways to engage (e.g. speaking, writing, drawing, observing)
- Value different forms of participation → create space for both verbal and non-verbal engagement
- Adapt pacing to participants’ needs → allow additional time for processing when needed and adjust the flow accordingly

What to notice and how to respond

Signs of overstimulation (*noise sensitivity, difficulty following multiple instructions, visible restlessness*)

What it may mean:

Participants may feel overwhelmed by sensory input or too much information at once.

What the facilitator can do:

- Reduce noise and pace
- Repeat or simplify instructions (one step at a time)
- Provide written or visual support
- Offer a short pause or sensory break

Signs of shutdown or withdrawal (*silence, disengagement, avoiding eye contact, stepping back from activity*)

What it may mean:

Participants may need more processing time or may feel overwhelmed or unsure how to engage.

What the facilitator can do:

- Acknowledge different participation styles
- Offer low-pressure options (write, draw, observe)
- Avoid calling on participants directly
- Give time and space without pressure

One participant dominating the space

What it may mean:

Some participants may feel more comfortable speaking, while others may need more space to engage.

What the facilitator can do:

- Gently structure turn-taking (e.g. "let's hear from others as well")
- Introduce alternative formats (writing, small groups)
- Set clear time or contribution limits
- Validate contributions while redistributing space

Module 1 Understanding Neurodivergence

Content

The module covers the core concept of neurodiversity as natural variation in neurodevelopment, framed within a biopsychosocial and human-rights-based perspective. It introduces common neurodivergent profiles and focuses on shared underlying mechanisms rather than diagnostic labels. Particular attention is given to sensory processing differences, regulation needs, stress responses, and the concept of the window of tolerance, highlighting how safety, predictability, and environmental conditions shape participation and behaviour. The content emphasises neuroaffirmative and trauma-informed perspectives as a foundation for inclusive practice within NeuroDem activities.

Learning Objective

The objective of this module is to build a shared understanding of neurodivergence among participants, using a neuroaffirmative and trauma-informed framework. The module supports a shift away from deficit-based interpretations toward understanding neurodivergent behaviour as shaped by context, environment, and regulation needs.

After completing the module, participants will have a shared understanding of neurodiversity and neurodivergence as natural variations in neurodevelopment, grounded in a biopsychosocial and human-rights-based perspective. They will be able to recognise key aspects of neurodivergent experience, including sensory processing differences, regulation needs, and stress responses, and understand how safety, predictability, and environmental conditions influence participation and behaviour.

Overview

1. Introduction of Participants & Icebreaker
2. Understanding Neurodiversity: Theoretical Introduction
3. Signals of Overwhelming and Overload — Recognition and Response
4. Reflection & Co-creation

1 Introduction of Participants & Icebreaker

Content

This opening block welcomes participants and establishes a safe, inclusive environment from the very first moment. The facilitator introduces shared communication guidelines and orientates participants to the physical space and the comfort tools available to them. Participants then meet each other in a neurodivergent-friendly way, explore what youth participation means to them using a digital word-cloud tool, and begin identifying barriers to youth participation in small groups.

Learning Objectives

Participants will feel safe, welcomed, and oriented within the group and the physical space. They will understand that all forms of communication and participation are equally valued. They will become aware of different communication preferences and practise inclusive self-introduction. They will begin reflecting on the concept of youth participation and identify key barriers from their own contexts.

Overview

0. Safe Environment & Communication Guidelines

1. Venue Orientation & Comfort Tools
2. Introduction of Participants (ND-friendly)
3. Icebreaker: What does youth participation mean to you?
4. Group work: Barriers to youth participation

Safe Environment & Communication Guidelines - Part 0

Duration: 10 minutes

Materials: Slide with guidelines displayed on screen; printed handout (one per participant) with the same guidelines

When: Before any other activity — the very first thing participants see and hear

Before any introductions or activities begin, the facilitator takes a few minutes to present the shared communication guidelines that will apply throughout the entire training. This step is not optional — it sets the psychological safety foundation for everything that follows, and signals to neurodivergent participants that their needs are anticipated and respected.

Instructions for implementation

The facilitator reads through the guidelines slowly and clearly, pausing after each point. Participants receive a printed copy they can keep and refer back to throughout the training. The facilitator explicitly states that these are not rules imposed from outside, but a shared agreement to help everyone feel comfortable.

Shared Guidelines

- All forms of communication are welcome — speaking, writing, drawing, using a device, or simply listening.
- You decide how and when to engage. You are never obligated to share personal or emotional stories.
- We all have different ways of thinking, experiencing, and communicating. All of these need to be respected.
- Take a break whenever you need to. The rest room next door is available at any time — no explanation needed.
- This is a safe space. What is shared in the group stays in the group.

Facilitator Notes

- Read each guideline aloud, slowly. Do not rush this step — it communicates that these points genuinely matter.
- After reading, invite participants to ask questions or suggest additions. Accept any suggestions generously.
- Remind participants that they can revisit the handout at any time during the training.
- If working online, share the guidelines in the chat and/or as a downloadable file so participants can always access them.
- Return to these guidelines briefly at the start of each new module, especially before emotionally sensitive content.

Venue Orientation & Comfort Tools - Part I

Duration: 10 minutes

Materials: Printed handout: venue map/scheme (one per participant); basket or tray of fidget/stimming toys at the side of the room; two-sided tokens (one per participant)

Many neurodivergent participants — particularly autistic or ADHD young people — benefit enormously from understanding their physical environment before any social or cognitive demands are placed on them. This short step familiarises everyone with the space, the support tools available, and the signals they can use to manage their own needs discreetly and without shame.

Instructions for implementation

Venue map handout

Duration: 3 minutes

Each participant receives a simple hand-drawn or printed scheme of the venue. The facilitator walks through the map, pointing out the following locations:

- The main training room (where we are now)
- The quiet/silent room — a designated rest space available at all times, no permission needed
- Toilets and exits
- Where to find water, snacks, and other practical items
- The fidget and stimming toy station within the room

Fidget and stimming toys

Duration: 3 minutes

The facilitator points out a basket or tray at the side of the room containing a selection of fidget and stimming tools (e.g., fidget spinners, stress balls, textured rings, chewable jewellery, tangle toys). The facilitator explains clearly:

- Anyone can pick up and use these tools at any time — no need to ask.
- Using them is not a sign of distraction — it often helps people concentrate and regulate.
- Please return items to the basket when you are done so others can use them.

Communication tokens

Duration: 4 minutes

Each participant receives a small physical token (e.g., a double-sided card or coloured disc). The facilitator explains its two sides (Side A - "Do not speak to me" , Side B "I need to talk to someone")

The facilitator demonstrates how to use the token and emphasises that using it is completely normal and encouraged. There is no stigma attached — these are tools for self-management, just like taking notes or wearing headphones.

Facilitator Notes

- Keep the tone warm and practical — present these tools as standard features of the training, not as special accommodations for certain people.

- Model using the tools yourself if possible — e.g., pick up a fidget toy and say 'I might use one of these myself today.'
- Ensure the quiet room is genuinely quiet and accessible — check it before the session starts.
- If a participant has the "do not speak to me" side up for a long time and you are concerned about their wellbeing, you may check in with a written note or through a peer supporter.
- Online adaptation: share the venue map as a digital file; replace the physical token with a virtual status (e.g., a coloured emoji or Zoom status) and explain it clearly.

Introduction of Participants (ND-Friendly) - Part II

Duration: 15 minutes

Materials: Name tags (stickers or cards), markers/pens, A4 paper sheets (optional)

Group size: Any – works with mixed international groups

People have different preferences for how they communicate and introduce themselves. Some feel confident speaking aloud in groups, while others may prefer written or visual alternatives. This activity accommodates all of these styles, ensuring every participant feels safe and included from the very start.

The aim of this activity is to help participants get to know each other's names and countries of origin in a relaxed, pressure-free way, while modelling that all forms of communication are equally valid.

Instructions for implementation

Every participant receives a name tag on which they write their first name (and optionally their city/country). The introduction then takes place in small groups, with three equally valid options:

- Say your name and city out loud to the group, OR
- Write your name and city on a piece of A4 paper and hold it up — no speaking required, OR
- Let the group lead person introduce you while you simply hold up your name tag.

The facilitator emphasises clearly at the start: all three options are equally valid and there is no expectation to speak.

Facilitator Notes

- Prepare name tags and markers at each seat before participants arrive.
- Announce all three introduction options clearly — verbally and displayed visually (e.g., on a slide or flipchart).
- Invite groups to self-organise gently — do not push anyone to join a group they are not comfortable with.
- Keep the energy light and welcoming — this sets the tone for the whole training.
- If working online, participants can type or draw their name on a virtual whiteboard (e.g., Miro or Jamboard).

Icebreaker: What Does Youth Participation Mean to You? - Part III

Duration: 15 minutes

Materials: Mentimeter (<https://www.mentimeter.com/>) — QR code and entry code displayed on screen; smartphones or laptops for participants

Group size: Any – works with mixed international groups

Before discussing barriers and strategies, it is important to activate participants' existing knowledge and personal understanding of youth participation. This activity uses an interactive digital tool to collect and visualise everyone's thoughts simultaneously — reducing the pressure of speaking one by one and giving quieter voices an equal presence on screen.

Instructions for implementation

Mentimeter word cloud

Duration: 5 minutes

The facilitator opens a prepared Mentimeter question on screen: *"What does youth participation mean to you? Answer in 3 words."*

Participants and partner representatives both respond using their phones or laptops. A live word cloud is generated on screen, growing in real time. The facilitator briefly highlights the most prominent themes without yet evaluating them.

Here is example of word cloud



Forming small groups

Duration: 5 minutes

Based on the most frequent answers from the word cloud, the facilitator identifies 4 themes and invites participants to self-select into a group. If the word cloud does not yield 4 clear themes, the facilitator pre-selects 4 relevant words.

Brief reflection

Duration: 5 minutes

Each small group has a moment to briefly discuss what their chosen theme means to them, preparing the ground for the barriers activity.

Facilitator Notes

- Set up the Mentimeter activity in advance and test it before the session. Display the QR code and entry code clearly on the main screen.

- Emphasise that all responses are anonymous — this encourages honest and diverse input.
- Give participants 1–2 minutes to respond before closing the question.
- Do not over-analyse the word cloud at this stage — keep the debrief light to maintain energy.

Group Work: Barriers to Youth Participation - Part IV

Duration: 15 minutes

Materials: Flipchart paper or large sticky notes, markers

Group size: 4 small groups (formed in previous activity)

Having reflected on what youth participation means to them, participants now examine what gets in the way. Working in small groups encourages deeper conversation and ensures all voices are heard before sharing with the large group.

Instructions for implementation

Small group discussion

Duration: 10 minutes

Each group discusses and writes down 4–5 barriers to youth participation from their experience or context. Groups should consider different types of barriers: structural, cultural, personal, digital, linguistic, etc. One person records the group's answers on flipchart paper.

Sharing with the large group

Duration: 5 minutes

One representative from each group briefly presents their list to the full group. The facilitator notes recurring themes on a shared flipchart or screen. This shared picture of barriers will serve as a reference point for later sessions.

Facilitator Notes

- Assign a timekeeper per group to ensure all groups finish within 10 minutes.
- Encourage groups to draw on their own youth work experience, not just abstract ideas.
- If a group is stuck, prompt them: think about access, motivation, resources, trust, representation, language...
- Acknowledge all contributions positively — there are no wrong answers at this stage.
- Keep the collected barriers visible (e.g., on a wall or shared screen) as a reference for the rest of the training.

2 Understanding Neurodiversity: Theoretical Introduction

Content

This activity forms the theoretical heart of Module 1. It introduces participants to the key concepts of neurodiversity — what it means for a brain to be 'wired differently', how autism and ADHD manifest across sensory, cognitive, and communication dimensions, the relationship between neurodivergence and trauma, and the affirmative approach as an alternative to normative thinking. A short movement break is included mid-session. The activity closes with a short video illustrating how a neurodivergent brain experiences the world, followed by individual reflection time.

Learning Objectives

Participants will understand what 'neurodiversity' means and why neurological variation is considered a natural part of human diversity. They will be able to describe key characteristics of autism and ADHD across sensory, cognitive, and communication domains. They will recognise the significant overlap between neurodivergent conditions, and between neurodivergence and trauma. They will understand the affirmative approach and begin to consider its implications for their own youth work practice.

Overview

Duration: Approx. 75 minutes total

Format: Facilitated presentation with pauses for questions; individual reflection at the end

Materials: Slides 10–25 and slide 30 of the Module 1 presentation; printed Movement Break handout (external document)

Instructions for implementation

Movement break

Duration: 7 minutes

After approximately 20 minutes of focused listening, the facilitator invites everyone to join a short movement break. This is a natural and intentional pause — not an interruption, but part of the session design. Movement helps the brain consolidate what it has just taken in, and re-energises participants for the second half of the theoretical content.

The three exercises are described in full in the external Movement Break handout (see below). The facilitator leads the exercises from the front of the room, participating alongside the group. All exercises can be done standing or seated — participants choose what feels comfortable.

Video: The neurodivergent brain in action

Duration: 10 minutes

To close the theoretical section, the facilitator invites participants to watch a short, playful video that illustrates — from the inside — how a neurodivergent brain experiences everyday situations. Rather than describing neurodivergence from the outside, this video offers a first-person perspective that often lands in a way that no amount of statistics or theory can.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lELy1gIT-kg>

Individual reflection after the video

Duration: 10 minutes

Immediately after the video, the facilitator does not open a group discussion. Instead, participants are given 3–4 minutes of quiet individual time to sit with their own reactions and note anything that struck them. This pause is important — it respects the fact that people process at different speeds, and that the most meaningful responses often need a moment to surface.

The facilitator might say: *"Take a few minutes just for yourself. You don't need to share anything. Just notice what this brought up for you — a memory, a question, a recognition, something you want to think about more."*

Reflection:

- What moment in the video resonated most with you — and why?
- Did it change or deepen how you think about any young person you work with?
- What is one thing you want to remember or explore further from this session?

Facilitator Notes

After the individual reflection time, the facilitator may briefly invite anyone who wishes to share a thought — but this is never required. The activity closes with a simple acknowledgement: *"Thank you for your attention and presence in this session. We'll carry these ideas into the practical work ahead."*

3 Signals of Overwhelming and Overload — Recognition and Response

Content

This is the first hands-on practical activity of Module 1. Moving from theoretical understanding to lived experience, participants explore the concrete signals that tell us a neurodivergent young person is approaching or experiencing overload. Through a physical sorting activity and a world café format, they build a shared vocabulary for recognising these signals and develop practical strategies for mitigating overwhelm across six categories.

Learning Objectives

Participants will be able to identify and name concrete signals of sensory, cognitive, and emotional overload in neurodivergent young people. They will begin to develop a practical toolkit of measures and accommodations that can be used to prevent or reduce overwhelm in youth work settings.

They will practise collaborative thinking through a world café format and reflect on what was surprising or newly understood.

Overview

1. The Six Overload Categories (Physical sorting activity + small group discussion)
2. World Café: What Can We Do About It? (world café + large group discussion)

Duration: approx. 75 minutes

Materials: 6 large sheets of paper or flipchart pages with category headings (see below); sets of small signal cards — one set per participant or pair; sticky notes (two colours); markers; wall space or tables for the 6 stations

Groups size: any — works best with 12–30 participants

Preparation: print and cut signal cards before the session; prepare 6 station sheets on walls or tables

The Six Overload Categories - Part I

The activity is structured around six categories of overwhelming signals. Each category represents a different domain in which overload can manifest in neurodivergent young people. Before the session, the facilitator prepares six large sheets — one per category — placed around the room as stations.

Sorting the signals

Duration: 20 minutes

Each participant (or pair) receives a set of small cards. Each card names a specific observable signal — a behaviour, a physical manifestation, or a communication pattern that may indicate a neurodivergent young person is becoming overwhelmed. Participants move freely around the room, reading each card and placing it on the large sheet they think it belongs to.

How to run it

- Distribute one set of signal cards to each participant or pair before beginning.
- Briefly introduce the six category sheets — walk participants around the room, naming each one without explaining them in detail. The activity itself will build understanding.
- Invite participants to begin moving, reading, and sorting at their own pace. There is no race and no single correct answer — some signals naturally fit more than one category.
- The facilitator circulates, available to answer questions, but does not correct or direct. If a card is placed 'wrongly,' leave it — it will generate useful discussion.
- When most participants have finished sorting (~15 minutes), invite everyone to do a quick gallery walk — moving around all six sheets to see the full picture before sitting down.

Small group discussion

Duration: 20 minutes

After the gallery walk, participants form small groups (3–5 people) and discuss what they noticed during the sorting activity. The facilitator offers the following prompts — displayed on screen or written on a flipchart:

Discussion prompts

- What was surprising? Were there signals you had not previously recognised as signs of overload in a neurodivergent young person?
- Were there any signals that were hard to place — that seemed to belong to more than one category?
- Which signals are easiest to miss or misinterpret (e.g., as 'bad behaviour', 'laziness', or 'being rude')?
- Have you observed any of these signals in young people you work with? What happened next?

Facilitator Notes

Misidentified signal cards are valuable — when participants disagree about which category a signal belongs to, that disagreement itself surfaces important nuances. For example, 'going very quiet' might be zone-out, escape behaviour, or emotional shutdown depending on the context. Encourage groups to sit with the ambiguity rather than resolving it too quickly.

World Café: What Can We Do About It? - Part II

Duration: 15 minutes preparation + 20 minutes large group discussion

Having identified and discussed the signals of overload, participants now turn to the question of response: what concrete measures, tools, and adaptations can a youth worker use to prevent or reduce overwhelming in each category? This step uses a world café format — participants rotate between stations, contributing ideas before a large group synthesis.

The world café format is deliberately non-hierarchical: everyone contributes, everyone moves, and ideas are built collectively rather than presented by individuals in front of the group. This models the kind of participatory practice the training is advocating for.

How to run it

1. Distribute sticky notes

Give each participant a set of sticky notes (ideally in two colours — one for measures already used in practice, one for new ideas). Each participant writes one idea per sticky note: a concrete measure, tool, accommodation, or approach that could help mitigate overload in that category.

2. First round — home station

Each participant starts at the category station they feel most connected to, or the one they found most surprising in Step 1. They place their sticky notes and read what others have added. 3–4 minutes per station.

3. Rotate

At the facilitator's signal, participants move to the next station (clockwise, or freely — their choice). They read the existing ideas, add new ones, and build on what they see. Continue rotating until each participant has visited at least 3–4 stations.

4. Large group synthesis

After the rotation, everyone gathers. The facilitator briefly tours each station, reading out a selection of the sticky notes and inviting participants to highlight what surprised them, what they want to remember, and what they would actually try in practice. 20 minutes.

Evaluation of the lesson - Reflection & Co-creation

Reflection is not a nice addition to non-formal learning — it is one of its most essential components. In formal education, learning is often measured by what participants can reproduce: facts, definitions, correct answers. In non-formal education, learning happens through experience, dialogue, and the active integration of new ideas with existing knowledge and practice. Reflection is the mechanism through which that integration takes place.

Without a structured reflective moment, even a rich and stimulating day of learning can leave participants with a collection of impressions rather than genuine insight. Reflection creates the conditions for participants to:

- Consolidate what they have taken in — moving from 'I heard this' to 'I understand this'
- Notice what genuinely resonated, challenged, or confused them
- Connect new ideas to their existing practice, experience, and context
- Identify what they want to do differently, explore further, or bring back to their teams
- Give honest feedback on the methodology — what worked, what felt difficult, what could be improved

In the NeuroDem Labs training specifically, reflection also serves an additional purpose: it models the kind of practice we are advocating for. Creating a genuine pause, offering multiple ways to contribute, and valuing all forms of expression — including silence and written notes — is itself an example of neurodivergent-friendly facilitation.

Overview

Duration: Approx. 60 minutes

1. Introduction by the main facilitator
2. Small group reflection (peer-facilitated)
3. Individual written notes (optional)
4. Closing summary by the main facilitator

Introduction by the main facilitator - Part I

Duration: 10 minutes

Before moving into small groups, the main facilitator takes a few minutes to introduce what reflection is and why it is part of the programme. This should be warm and conversational, not a lecture — the goal is to reframe the closing of the day as something meaningful rather than procedural.

The facilitator might say something like:

"We've covered a lot today — some of it perhaps familiar, some of it new, some of it maybe challenging. Before we close, we're going to give ourselves a moment to actually sit with it. In non-formal education, this reflective step is as important as everything that came before it — it's how we move from information to understanding, and from understanding to action. There are no right answers in what follows. Your honest reactions are exactly what matters."

Small group reflection (peer-facilitated) - Part II

Duration: 30 minutes

Participants move into small groups (4-6 participants) — ideally organised by country for international gatherings, or by organisation if there are few

present, etc., to allow for more contextualised conversation about their own practice and systems. Within each group, one participant volunteers (or is invited) to take the role of group facilitator: they guide the conversation through the questions, make sure everyone has space to contribute, and may take brief notes if the group wishes.

The group facilitator does not need to have any special expertise — they simply hold the space, introduce each question, and invite responses. The main facilitator circulates between groups, available if needed but not directing the conversation.

Participants who prefer to reflect individually

Individual written reflection is always offered as an equally valid alternative. A participant may work through the questions alone, in writing, and does not need to share their responses with the group. Their written notes are their own — nothing is collected.

Reflection questions

- What was new or surprising for you today — in the content, in the activities, or in your own reactions?
- How do you feel at the end of this first day? (You can answer with words, an image, a colour, a gesture — whatever feels right.)
- What questions are you leaving with? What do you want to think about or explore further?
- Is there anything in today's methodology — how the day was designed and facilitated — that you would like to take back to your own practice or suggest doing differently?

Closing summary by the main facilitator - Part III

Duration: 10 minutes

After the small group discussions, everyone comes back together. The main facilitator briefly invites each group to share one thing — a question they are carrying, something they want to remember, or a word that captures how they are leaving. This is always voluntary; no group is required to share.

The facilitator then offers a brief closing summary of the Module : naming what was covered, acknowledging the effort and openness participants brought, and pointing forward to what is coming next. The closing should feel warm and complete — not rushed.

A possible closing frame:

"At this session we built a shared foundation — a language, a set of concepts, and the beginning of a practical toolkit. You brought your experience, your questions, and your honesty into the room, and that has made it richer. Tomorrow we'll take this further into practice. For now — thank you, rest well, and we'll see you in the morning."

Learning material

[Safe environment & communication](#)

[Introduction and IceBreaker](#)

[Communication tokens](#)

[Movement Break](#)

[Signals of Overwhelming and Overload](#)

Module 2 Inclusive Communication and Interaction

Content

Participants learn about potential barriers to mutual communication between neurodivergent and neurotypical people. Various options and tools for barrier-free communication are presented, and a joint strategy for their use in the NeuroDem Labs is developed.

Participants explore barrier-free design of working conditions and environments in their joint work with neurodivergent young people. A joint checklist for designing a learning environment that is as accessible as possible is created.

Participants deal with discrimination-sensitive language. In this context, self-reflection and a bias check with regard to their own assumptions and prejudices take place.

Learning Objective

Participants will learn about potential barriers that can arise in communication between neurotypical and neurodivergent people. They will learn about various tools that can be used to facilitate barrier-free communication and establish low-barrier learning environments. Participants will reflect on their own preconceptions and learn the basics of discrimination-sensitive language.

Overview

1. Introduction: My communication style
2. Communication styles and barriers
3. Inclusive/discrimination-sensitive language

4. Creating a barrier-free working environment

1 Introduction: My communication style

People communicate differently and therefore experience different communication barriers; these barriers are found in all people, not just neurodivergent individuals.

The aim of this exercise is to introduce the topic and raise initial awareness.

Duration: 15 Minutes

Materials: moderation cards/paper, pens

Objective and Content: People communicate differently and therefore experience different communication barriers; these barriers are found in all people, not just neurodivergent individuals.

The aim of this exercise is to introduce the topic and raise initial awareness.

My communication style - Part I

Duration: 5 Minutes

Participants consider for themselves:

- Which communication methods work well for me?
- Which communication situations or styles irritate me?
- What are my needs or preferences?

They note down 2–4 characteristics of their own communication style.

My communication style - Part II

Duration: 10 Minutes

Participants find people who have similar communication preferences or use different communication styles.

They then form pairs or small groups in which they discuss:

- How are our communication styles similar?
- How do they differ?
- Which situations work well for some but poorly for others?
- What can we learn from these differences for our communication with each other?

2 Communication styles and barriers

Duration: 60 Minutes

Materials: Flip chart paper, sticky notes, Handout on Inclusive Communication

Objective and Content: Every person has different communication needs and preferences. Even though the communication needs of neurodivergent people are similar, they cannot be generalized.

This exercise aims to show participants a way to ask a group about their communication needs.

Theoretical Input (20 Minutes)

Materials required: Presentation

Communication Map - Preparation

The facilitator prepares 4 posters around the room:

- Language
- Materials
- Environment & Sensory Aspects
- Activities & Methods

Communication Map - Part I

Duration: 25 Minutes

Participants walk between the posters in small groups or alone and add sticky notes with:

- what supports understanding
- what makes communication easier
- what practices prevent confusion
- what helps them follow group processes

Communication Map Part II

Duration: 15 Minutes

The facilitator groups together with the participants similar notes and summarizes the needs identified by the group.

This becomes the co-created list of inclusive communication needs for the workshop or future work.

Theoretical Background

Inclusive communication means that all people have access to information, can understand and cognitively process it, and that barriers are eliminated. In reality, however, communication is often not inclusive and accessible, excluding neurodivergent people (and other people with disabilities) from the community and making it impossible for them to participate actively. Inclusive communication not only prevents

misunderstandings and false assumptions but also helps to break down stereotypes and gain a different perspective on neurodivergent people. In order to prevent the exclusion of neurodivergent people, **every form of communication must be designed and planned to be inclusive from the very beginning**. It is important to respect the needs of each individual and not to extrapolate from a single person to a highly heterogeneous group (CIPR, 2023). Inclusive communication avoids prejudiced, stereotypical or discriminatory expressions and does not exclude anyone through the use of language (ESN, 2020).

To identify and eliminate barriers to communication between neurodivergent and neurotypical people, it is first necessary to understand how these barriers originate. The way neurodivergent and neurotypical people communicate can differ greatly, which sometimes leads to misunderstandings and comprehension problems.

Neurodivergent people often tend to communicate in a **very direct** and **content-oriented manner**, while neurotypical people tend to communicate **indirectly and in a relationship-oriented manner**. Due to their focus on the content of what is said, neurodivergent people are often perceived as rude or tactless by neurotypical people. The indirect communication and lack of explicit information from neurotypical people can lead to confusion, overwhelm and frustration in neurodivergent people (Deme, 2025).

Neurotypical people are often fond of using **metaphors and proverbs**, which are not always understood or are taken literally by neurodivergent people. This can also lead to confusion and misunderstandings. (CIPD, 2018).

Further difficulties may arise from the different **ways in which empathy is shown**. Neurodivergent people are by no means – as is often assumed – lacking in empathy but rather show different forms of empathy than neurotypical people. They tend to talk about their own experiences when someone tells them about problems or worries. What is often perceived as an attempt to gain attention and is therefore considered rude is in fact an expression of empathy. The phenomenon of neurodivergent and neurotypical people not understanding each other's empathy is known as the **double empathy problem**. Due to their different communication styles, both groups have difficulties understanding the empathy of the other group. This is therefore a mutual problem that affects both sides. (Deme, 2025).

To make sure communication is as barrier-free as possible, you need to think about a bunch of different things. These have to do with language as well as other ways of communicating that can add to or improve it.

Language

Many neurodivergent people find clear, concise and structured communication helpful. Therefore, metaphors, proverbs and unnecessary information should be avoided.

An example:

Conversation 1: Lots of metaphors and proverbs

Person A: "We need to strike while the iron is hot, or the ship will sail without us."

Person B: "Uh... iron? Ship? I'm not sure what you mean."

Person A: "Well, let's not throw in the towel before we've crossed that bridge."

Person B: "I'm confused. What exactly should I do?"

Person A: "We've got to hit the ground running, or we'll be barking up the wrong tree."

Person B: "Could you please just tell me what needs to be done?"

Conversation 2: Clear and Direct Language

Person A: "We need to finish this task today so we stay on schedule."

Person B: "Okay, what exactly do you want me to do?"

Person A: "Please prepare the report and send it to me by 4 PM."

Person B: "Got it. I'll work on it now and let you know when it's done."

Person A: "Perfect, thank you!"

Person A uses many metaphors and proverbs in the first conversation, which causes Person B great confusion and eventually frustration. In the second conversation, this is avoided, so Person B immediately knows what to do.

In addition to adapting one's own verbal communication, non-verbal communication channels should also be used, as some neurodivergent people communicate non-verbally, either temporarily or exclusively. Alternative communication methods include, for example, the use of symbols to support verbal language or the use of digital media. (Broome, 2024; Stille Stunde, 2025).

Here are a few examples:

- 'Please wear a safety helmet.' → Symbol: Helmet
- 'Please disinfect your hands.' → Symbol: Disinfectant bottle
- 'Exit.' → Symbol: Arrow to the right + door

Working materials

Barrier-free working materials and handouts are an essential part of inclusive communication. Written documents should ideally follow a simple and logical structure. The use of different headings, short paragraphs and bullet points as well as checklists can help. An overview at the beginning of a longer document and a summary of the most important points can also support communication. Visual symbols can be used as an alternative method of communication.

When designing documents, simple, sans serif fonts should be used (e.g. Arial, Calibri or Verdana). Only one colour should be used for the background, which should not make it difficult to read the text.

Long texts and paragraphs, bright colours and eye-catching shapes should be avoided, as these tend to be perceived as distracting and disruptive by neurodivergent people. (Broome, 2024).

Methods

The following section deals with the inclusive design and implementation of some methods. However, it should always be borne in mind that all people have different needs and that methods and exercises may need to be adapted accordingly.

Presentations

Since different people process information in different ways, there is no single solution for how best to give presentations. However, in order to reach as many people as possible, different communication channels should be used. According to the two-sense principle, for example, the content discussed should also be available to read on a slide or handout. Important information can be conveyed to a large number of people via text, images or audio. When distributing this information, multiple

channels such as email, intranet or print media should also be used. At the end of a presentation, participants can be given the opportunity to obtain further information on the topics covered by sharing additional literature or videos. (Broome, 2024).

Websites and digital learning content

Websites with bright colours, lots of animations and auto-playing videos, complicated navigation and time limits (e.g. when completing tasks) can be challenging for neurodivergent people (WCAG Blog, 2025). When creating websites and digital learning content, there are a few points that should be taken into account in order to make them as inclusive as possible.

Website design: Website navigation should be simple and intuitive to ensure ease of use and avoid overwhelming users. High-contrast text and sans serif fonts are helpful for improving readability. However, overly bright colour combinations should be avoided, as these can be sensory overload for some people (Netz-Barrierefrei). All buttons and links available on a website should have clear labels indicating their purpose: unlike a button labelled 'Click here', the label 'Download guide' makes it clear what will happen next (ESN, 2020).

Flexibility of use: Users of a website should always have the option to adjust the text size, line spacing and colours. In addition, the site should support different input methods (e.g. keyboard or voice control). Another aspect that contributes to accessibility is providing texts in easy-to-understand language (Netz-Barrierefrei, 2023).

Avoiding sensory overload: Automatic animations can be a major barrier for neurodivergent people. If you do not want to completely dispense with these in the design of your website, you should ensure that they can be

deactivated by users. To increase the comprehensibility of content, visual or auditory alternatives (diagrams, videos, etc.) can be used in addition to plain text, or these can be supplemented with pictograms (Netz-Barrierefrei). In accordance with the WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines), users should have the option of adjusting time limits (e.g. when completing tasks) to suit their needs (WCAG Blog, 2025).

Group work

Group work can be challenging for many people. It is therefore essential that it is designed to be as inclusive as possible. Clear structuring in terms of time and task management, as well as feedback for the purpose of collaboration and achieving group goals, can contribute to this (Salvatore et al., 2024).

In a survey of neurodivergent students, the latter stated that they preferred to decide on the members of the group themselves when working in groups. In addition, there should always be the possibility of flexibilising and modifying group work and tasks, including the option of working on the content and tasks alone rather than in a group if this promises greater learning success and increased well-being (Dwyer et al., 2022; Salvatore et al., 2024).

If problems or conflicts arise during group work that cannot be resolved independently, moderators should actively support and accompany the clarification process.

The effort and challenges that group work can present must be taken into account and appreciated at all times. Even if it is essential for the learning progress and competence development of the group members, it also involves significant time and cognitive demands. However, with sufficient

time and regular breaks, it can be ensured that all group members have the opportunity to participate and learn (Salvatore et al., 2024).

Break: 15 Minutes

3 Inclusive and discrimination-sensitive language

Duration: 60 Minutes

Materials required: Mentimeter Access, Flipchart, Pens

Objectives and Content: Language shapes reality, or as Mark Twain once said: "The difference between the almost right word and the right word is really a large matter. It's the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning."

The aim of this is to give participants an understanding of the power of language and its impact on reality, and to encourage them to reflect on their own language use.

Introduction: The power of language - Preparation

Duration: 10 Minutes

The facilitators can create a survey free of charge using Mentimeter (<https://www.mentimeter.com/>) with the following questions:

- How does language affect us?
- What meaning does language hold for me?

Introduction: The power of language - Part I

Duration: 5 Minutes

The facilitators share the corresponding QR code with the participants and ask participants to answer questions as briefly as possible.

Introduction: The power of language - Part II

Duration: 5 Minutes

The results of the word cloud are viewed together. Participants have the opportunity to explain certain terms or share their thoughts with the others.

Words that shape reality - Part I

Duration: 10 Minutes

Participants are asked to think of one word or phrase they have heard about neurodivergent people that shapes how society sees them.

They write 1–2 examples anonymously and place them on the wall/board under: “Words that shape reality”

The participants or the facilitator briefly group them.

Words that shape reality - Part II

Duration: 10 Minutes

Participants work alone or in a group

Each group chooses 3–4 terms from the warm-up board and discusses:

- What message does this term send about neurodivergent people?
- Which disability model does it come from? (medical vs social)
- How might it impact self-image, mental health, or societal attitudes?

Groups summarise findings on a poster titled: “Impact on reality”

Words that shape reality - Part III

Duration: 10 Minutes

In the same groups, participants now transform analysed terms into neuroaffirming language:

- Replace: Exchange deficit-based terms for affirming ones: e.g. "Stereotypy" → "stimming"
- Reframe: Move from the idea of normal vs abnormal to: e. g. part of human variation
- Personal preference: Individuals write how they identify (optional)

Words that shape reality - Part IV

Duration: 5 Minutes

Collective Reflection

The facilitator invites participants to briefly reflect:

- Which terms felt empowering or relieving?
- Which ones were hard to transform — and why?
- What did you learn about how language creates or limits possibilities?

Theoretical Background

The use of language reflects the current reality and society's attitude towards individuals and groups of people. It mirrors historical and current power relations as well as notions of normality. At the same time, language can create and change reality, as it influences perceptions, emotions and thoughts about certain groups of people in society. The conscious and unconscious use of language to devalue, discriminate

against, but also to recognise, respect and accept has a significant influence on reality. Language alone cannot change social problems and injustices, but it can make a decisive contribution to doing so (Debus, 2021).

Neurodiversity research has been (and probably still is) conducted predominantly by neurotypical individuals, with neurodivergence being viewed as a 'disorder' that requires adjustment or, at best, a 'cure'. This is reflected in the ableist and deficit-oriented language that has a decisive influence on society's image and treatment of neurodivergent people. Ableist language not only has a negative impact on the mental health of neurodivergent people, but also reproduces an ableist and discriminatory system. That is why it is of utmost importance to address the influence of language on the reality of different groups of people – both in academic and everyday contexts (Chellappa, 2023).

Neurodivergent affirming language has developed out of the neurodivergent movement and aims to use language that not only recognises the existence of neurodivergence, but also encourages and accepts it. The use of neurodivergent-affirming language supports neurodivergent people in recognising themselves and exercising their rights (Dewar, 2024). The following section will discuss some aspects that contribute to neurodivergent-affirming language.

People and Identity First Language

An ongoing topic is the debate about the 'correct' term for neurodivergent people, especially autistic people.

Some self-advocacy organisations for people with disabilities are seeking to change perceptions of disability through the use of 'people-first'

language (e.g. person with a disability). By mentioning the person first, the aim is to promote the autonomy of the person concerned and create a more positive identity (Bailey 1991, Blaska, 1993 by Kenny et al.). Terms that mention the disability first – i.e. identity-first language (disabled person) – are rejected by advocates of people-first language because they overly emphasise and highlight a person's disability. However, this attitude is by no means accepted by all self-advocates. Person-centred language contradicts the principle of placing positive adjectives before a noun. As a rule, one would speak of 'beautiful people' and not 'people who are beautiful'. According to this way of thinking, the use of people-first language frames disability as something negative (Kenny et al.). As a study conducted in 2022 showed, more than 90% of autistic people surveyed said they use the term 'autistic person,' with 76% of respondents using only this term (Bonnello, 2022). Another study (Kenny et al., 2015) concluded that it is primarily professionals who prefer to use the term 'person with autism', while autistic people and their relatives use the term 'autistic people'. Bonnello also concludes that autistic people and their relatives increasingly use 'identity-first' language, while professionals prefer 'people-first' language or the term 'ASD' (autism spectrum disorder) (2022). This finding is not surprising, as professionals are generally encouraged to use people-first language in their training (Kenny et al., 2015).

When people are acknowledged as experts in their own lives and as self-advocates, as is the case in this project, the terminology preferred by the person or group of people concerned should always be used. Since the majority of autistic people prefer the use of identity-first language, this should be considered the standard for referring to this group of people. However, it should not be forgotten that there are also people who prefer

people-first language. If there is any uncertainty about the designation, it makes sense to simply ask the person directly.

Disclaimer: We are referring primarily to the designation of autistic people here, as this topic is increasingly found in the literature and the autistic community. Nevertheless, these findings can also be applied to the situation of other neurodivergent people.

The term „stimming“

Neuroaffirmative language uses the term “stimming” and rejects the term “stereotypy”, which is based on Skinner's behaviourism. According to this, neurodivergent stereotypies are seen as something negative that needs to be regulated and corrected. However, self-stimulatory behaviour is necessary for many neurodivergent people to regulate themselves and helps them feel more connected to their own bodies and their environment. (Dewar, 2024).

Neurodiversity against normality

The idea of what is considered ‘normal’ goes back to the medical model of disability, which views disability as a problem that needs to be treated or, at best, cured, and which requires disabled people to adapt to their environment (Retief & Letsosa, 2018; WHO, 2001). The classification of people as ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ is ableist and does not reflect the recognition that it is the environment and its circumstances that disable a person (WHO, 2001; Waldschmidt, 2005). Walker's paradigm of neurodiversity is based on the social model, in which there is no concept of ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’, but only a spectrum of human existence (Walker as cited in Dewar, 2024). This spectrum of neurodiversity encompasses all neurocognitive functions that humans can have.

Neurotypical people benefit from the way society works, while neurodivergent people differ from this. However, there is no such thing as normal or abnormal functioning (Dewar, 2024).

Break: 15 Minutes

4 Creation of an inclusive working environment

Duration: 60 Minutes

Materials: Papers, Pencils, Flipchart Paper, Cards with accessibility aspects

Content and learning objectives: When it comes to accessibility, the physical level is typically considered. However, there are many other barriers that are often overlooked and that can make participation difficult or impossible for some people.

The aim of this exercise is to broaden the participant's perspective on accessibility and sharpen their awareness of accessibility with regard to neurodivergent people.

Which aspects relate to accessibility? - Part I

Duration: 10 Minutes

Participants receive cards depicting different aspects of accessibility. They are asked to sort these cards into different categories, either individually, in pairs or in groups.

The categories are the following:

- Physical accessibility
- Sensory accessibility
- Organisational/social accessibility

- Communicative accessibility

Note: When assigning the various aspects of accessibility to the respective categories, the aim is not to assign them correctly or incorrectly, but rather to raise awareness of various barriers. Although a solution is suggested, it should be noted that some aspects could also fit into several categories.

Which aspects relate to accessibility? - Part II

Duration: 10 Minutes

Once the various aspects of accessibility have been assigned to the different categories, participants should reflect on the following questions individually, in pairs or in groups:

- Which aspects did we find difficult to classify? What could be the reason for this?
- Which aspects are often overlooked in workshops/seminars, etc.?
- What does accessibility mean for neurodivergent people?

Creation of an accessibility checklist - Part I

Duration: 20 Minutes

Now that participants have learned about different aspects of accessibility, the next step is to apply what they have learned to their work with neurodivergent young people.

The aim of this task is to create a checklist that takes into account the various aspects of accessibility and serves as a basis for preparing the NeuroDem Labs.

The respective categories of accessibility from the previous exercise are noted on four flipcharts. Participants can work individually, in pairs or in groups and each choose a category. Their task is now to note down

important aspects of accessibility for the upcoming labs in the form of a checklist. The aspects from the previous exercise are supplemented by experiences from their own practice and, if necessary, from the internet.

Creation of an accessibility checklist - Part II

Duration: 15 Minutes

The participants present the group's results. If anyone does not wish to present themselves, the moderator will do so. The other participants can add to the individual categories. A volunteer notes down all the results in a shared document (digital or analogue), which can be used by everyone at the end for the NeuroDem Labs.

Theoretical Background

There can be a number of barriers for neurodivergent people in work and learning situations. For example, a loud, restless environment can lead to sensory overload, while tasks that offer little stimulation can lead to restlessness, distraction or boredom (CIPD, 2018).

Removing barriers in the work and learning environment enables neurodivergent people to participate and be included. Most of these measures are easy to implement and often free of charge.

Level of noise: Quiet workstations and relaxation rooms are beneficial in preventing overstimulation and enhancing concentration. The use of headphones or earplugs should also be permitted at all times.

Lighting: As bright and flickering lights are often perceived as disruptive, natural light sources should be used. Wearing sunglasses (even indoors) can help to counteract this overstimulation.

Equipment: Various aids can help to organise group work or presentations. These include designated places for work materials (with labels) and instructions for using equipment.

Movement: Some neurodivergent people find it easier to concentrate on a task if they do not have to sit still in a chair the whole time. Therefore, it should be possible to stand, move around or even sit on the floor (Christner, 2024).

Stimming-Tools: Stimming, which refers to recurring and repetitive actions such as nail biting, drumming with one's fingers, or rocking one's leg, serves to help people – not only those who are neurodivergent – to regulate themselves, calm down, and concentrate. Stimming tools or fidget toys (play dough, fidget spinners or chewable jewellery) can be helpful in this regard. These aids are particularly beneficial for neurodivergent people in situations and environments with many stimuli. That is why it should always be possible to use them in an inclusive and barrier-free working and learning environment. (Stille Stunde, 2025)

Evaluation of the lesson

Duration: 15 Minutes

Participants take time to answer the following questions for themselves:

- What are the key insights I gained from this module?
- In which specific situations can I apply what I have learned?
- What questions have emerged for me?

If desired, the findings can be shared with one another.

References

Broome, G. (2024). Neuroinclusive communications guide. URL: https://edu.web.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/edu/documents/media/neuroinclusive_communications_guide.pdf

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) (2018): Neurodiversity at Work. URL: https://www.cipd.org/globalassets/media/knowledge/knowledge-hub/guides/neurodiversity-at-work_2018_tcm18-37852.pdf

Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) (2023). Inclusive communication. A guide from the CIPR's diversity and inclusion network

Christner, R. W. (2024). Understanding and supporting neurodiversity in the classroom. URL: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/living-psyched/202403/understanding-and-supporting-neurodiversity-in-the-classroom>

Debus, K. (2021). Warum sich die Mühe lohnt. Zur (nicht nur) pädagogischen Relevanz diskriminierungssensibler Sprache. URL: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/357680278_Warum_sich_die_Muehe_lohnt_Zur_nicht_nur_padaogischen_Relevanz_diskriminierungssensibler_Sprache-

Deme, Paula (2025). Neurodivergenz verstehen: Kommunikation. URL: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/neurodivergenz-verstehen-kommunikation-paula-deme-cuwzf/>

Dwyer, P.; Mineo, E.; Mifsud, K.; Lindholm, C.; Gurba, A.; Waisman, T. C. (2022). Building Neurodiversity-Inclusive Postsecondary Campuses: Recommendations for Leaders in Higher Education. In: Autism in Adulthood. 5(1). 1 – 14. DOI: 10.1089/aut.2021.0042

Erasmus Student Network AISBL (ESN) (2020). Inclusive Communication Manual. A practical guideline on how to communicate inclusively with international youth. URL: <https://esn.org/inclusive-communication-manual>

Neff, M. A. (2023). Understanding sensory overload and its impact in emotions. URL: <https://neurodivergentinsights.com/sensory-overload-and-emotions/?srsltid=AfmBOoqjvx1i-DStwnrNHjQAmDaz6EjOPkKwQSMa6gRpc5wuH-wBGqo>

Netz-Barrierefrei (2023). Digitale Barrierefreiheit für neuro-diverse Personen. URL: https://www.netz-barrierefrei.de/wordpress/neuro-diversitaet-und-barrierefreiheit/#Moegliche_Massnahmen

Salvatore, S.; White, C.; Podowitz-Thomas, S. (2024). "Not a cookie cutter situation": how neurodivergent students experience group work in their STEM courses. In: International Journal of STEM Education 11(47). URL: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40594-024-00508-0>

Stille Stunde (2025). Neurodivergenz im Arbeitsleben. URL: <https://www.stille-stunde.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Neurodivergenz-im-Arbeitsleben.pdf>

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) Blog (2025). How WCAG benefits everyone. A focus on neurodiversity and accessibility. URL: <https://www.wcag.com/blog/digital-accessibility-and-neurodiversity/>

Learning material

[Presentation on Communication](#)

[Handout Inclusive Communication](#)

[Accessibility Cards](#)

Module 3 Strategies for cross-sectional collaboration

Learning Objective

This module introduces cross-sector and cross-disciplinary collaboration strategies to strengthen support, participation, and advocacy for neurodivergent young people. It focuses on coordination between youth work, education, health, social services, and civil society organisations.

Through hands-on, practice-oriented activities and a universal design approach, participants map their local collaboration landscape, analyse gaps in support, and co-design concrete actions to improve accessibility, continuity, and democratic participation.

Content

Participants will understand key principles of cross-sector collaboration for neurodivergent youth within biopsychosocial and human-rights frameworks. They will identify relevant stakeholders, their roles and limits, and recognize common barriers (e.g., stigma, gatekeeping, systemic ableism). Participants will draft at least one practical collaboration pathway and build confidence in leading neuro-affirmative cross-sector dialogue.

Overview

1. Introduction and framing
2. Cross-sectional collaboration: input and reflection
3. Stakeholder and systems mapping
4. Case-based analysis with NVC and neuroaffirmative approach
5. Co-designing improved collaboration pathways
6. Rapid prototyping of collaboration routines
7. Sharing, collective sense-making and wrap-up

1 Introduction and reflection on cross-sectional collaboration

Duration: 35–45 Minutes

Objective and content:

The aim of this activity is to introduce the topic, create psychological safety, and build a shared understanding of cross-sectional collaboration around neurodivergent youth. Participants are oriented to the session goals and reflect on their own practical experiences of successful and unsuccessful collaboration.

Materials: Presentation slides, Mentimeter account / mobile devices or sticky notes, flipchart and markers, worksheet templates

Facilitator guide for Learning Activity 1:

1. Opening and framing

Duration: 5–7 Minutes

The facilitator welcomes participants and introduces the purpose of the session.

Suggested framing:

"Welcome, everyone. Today we are going to explore how to collaborate across sectors around neurodivergent youth using co-creation. Every voice matters; there are no right or wrong ideas."

The facilitator presents the session objectives:

Co-design, working in diverse teams, using collective intelligence, inclusivity

The facilitator briefly explains the agenda and timing to support clarity and safety.

2. Setting group agreements

Duration: 5 Minutes

The facilitator invites participants to establish shared agreements for respectful and effective collaboration.

Suggested prompt:

"What do we need so that everyone can contribute safely?"

Participants can propose additional agreements if needed.

3. Mentimeter warm-up

Duration: 5–8 Minutes

Participants respond to a Mentimeter word cloud question:

“When you hear ‘cross-sectional collaboration around neurodivergent youth’, what words come to mind?”

The facilitator projects the results, highlights recurring themes such as schools, NGOs, families, health, barriers, or silos, and links them to the day’s focus on systems and stakeholders.

4. Short input: collaboration models

Duration: 10–15 Minutes

The facilitator gives a short structured input supported by visuals.

- Core principles of co-design
- Equal voice: everyone’s contribution shapes the outcome
- Building on ideas: diversity strengthens solutions
- Power-sharing: roles and decision-making are transparent
- What cross-sectional collaboration means

Key actors may include:

- schools
- social services
- NGOs
- health professionals
- families
- peer support networks
- self-advocacy groups
- local government
- employers

The aim is to coordinate around the needs and aspirations of neurodivergent young people.

Siloed vs. co-designed collaboration

Siloed collaboration: actors work separately, information flow is low, goals are misaligned, and the young person's needs are fragmented

Co-designed collaboration: goals and language are shared, routines are jointly designed, decision-making is aligned, and the young person and family remain involved

5. Individual reflection

Duration: 8–10 Minutes

Participants reflect individually in writing, drawing, or quiet thinking.

Reflection prompts:

- Think of one example where collaboration around neurodivergent youth worked well. What made it work?
- Think of one example where collaboration broke down or never really started. What happened?

Participants can jot notes on paper or digitally. If useful, they may also submit 1–2 short anonymous examples through a Mentimeter sticky-note slide.

To support accessibility, the facilitator may provide soft background music, a quiet corner, or optional pair reflection.

2 Stakeholder and systems mapping

Duration: 35–40 Minutes

Objective and Content:

This activity helps participants create a shared picture of the local system around neurodivergent youth. They identify key stakeholders, existing relationships, and bottlenecks in collaboration. The aim is to make visible where coordination is weak, missing, or overburdened.

Materials: Large paper sheets, markers, Presentation slide with mapping template, mapping template

Facilitator guide for Learning Activity 2:

1. Introducing the mapping task

Duration: 5–10 Minutes

The facilitator explains the purpose of the exercise:

“We will now map the local system around neurodivergent young person: who is involved, how they relate, and where collaboration gets stuck. This gives us a shared picture of the landscape.”

A visual template is shown, with the neurodivergent young person at the centre and possible stakeholders around them.

families

- schools
- mental health services
- social services
- NGOs

- self-advocacy groups
- local government
- employers
- peer support networks

Next step is identifying the bottlenecks by connecting the neurodivergent person and the stakeholders. The facilitator explains how participants will use the symbols:

- solid lines = strong relationships
- dotted lines = weak relationships
- no line = no contact
- red dots = bottlenecks or problems

An example can be shown briefly, but the task itself is completed by participants in groups.

2. Small-group mapping

Duration: 25–30 Minutes

After the task introduction, the participants are divided into 4–5 mixed groups, ideally with a diversity of roles, work backgrounds, and experience levels. Each group receives one large sheet of paper and markers. They can also be handed down a mapping template (in the Materials).

Task:

- Place stakeholders around the central young person
- Draw lines representing current relationships

- Mark barriers and bottlenecks
- Prepare to identify the key bottlenecks in the system

The facilitator circulates and offers guiding questions:

- What is one bottleneck you see? Why is it happening?
- Who should be here but is not?
- Which relationship could be stronger if communication improved?
- This activity supports collective analysis of the collaboration system and prepares participants for the following case-based work.

3 Case-based analysis, co-design, and rapid prototyping

Duration: 90–100 Minutes

Materials: Case cards, analysis template worksheet, sticky notes, markers, Mentimeter access, prototype templates, Non-violent communication feelings and needs template

Objective and Content:

Participants apply the principles of co-design to realistic scenarios in which collaboration has broken down. They identify pain points, use non-violent communication and neuroaffirmative principles to analyze the cases, generate ideas, cluster possible solutions, and develop a practical prototype for improved collaboration.

Facilitator guide for Learning Activity 3:

1. Presenting short cases

Duration: 10–30 Minutes

The facilitator introduces an example case and asks participants to listen for collaboration pain points and system failures.

The facilitator may invite one or two volunteers to restate the case in their own words to ensure a shared understanding.

The facilitator and the group then analyse Lea's case using Nonviolent Communication (NVC) and a neuroaffirmative approach. Using Lea's example, the facilitator models the upcoming activity.

Participants then form groups and choose one scenario to work on, applying the same approach demonstrated in Lea's case.

Scenario 1

Vanya is 16, autistic, and has strong interests in graphic design. Her school has accommodations, but nobody is talking to the support group she attends every Monday. The psychiatrist-led support group knows little about her school situation apart from what Vanya shares, and the school does not know about her life outside school. Her parents are left carrying information between different actors.

Scenario 2

A social worker refers 14-year-old Mark for psychiatric evaluation because teachers report behavioural problems. The clinic diagnoses anxiety and ADHD. Nobody asks Mark or his family what his actual needs are. The school, clinic, and family all understand the situation differently. There is no joint plan, Mark feels overwhelmed, and he stops attending school.

Scenario 3

Maria is a second-year university student. She moved to this country from Kazakhstan and is now fluent and relatively well integrated. She was recently diagnosed with autism. She has registered the accommodations she needs with her study department, but she still feels she lacks appropriate support and understanding.

2. Group analysis using NVC and a neuroaffirmative approach

Duration: 25–30 Minutes

Groups either choose or are assigned one scenario. Each group receives a task card and an analysis template.

Task 1: Identify pain points

- Where does collaboration fail?
- Who is affected?

Task 2: Apply Marshall Rosenberg's Non-Violent Communication

- Observations: What is actually happening?
- Feelings: How might different actors feel?
- Needs: What needs are not being met?
- Requests: What clear and realistic requests could address those needs?

Task 3: Apply neuroaffirmative principles

- Respect autistic and neurodivergent communication and sensory needs

- Avoid pathologizing the young person
- Locate the problem in the system, not in the individual
- Ask how the system can adapt to the young person

The facilitator supports the process with prompts such as:

- What does the young person need that they are not getting?
- How would an autistic person prefer to be communicated with in this situation?
- What small but viable change could improve the situation?

3. Co-designing improved collaboration pathways

Duration: 20–25 Minutes

Step 1: Idea generation

Participants brainstorm as many ideas as possible to improve collaboration in the scenario.

Suggested facilitator framing:

“Now let’s brainstorm solutions. There are no bad ideas. We focus on quantity first and evaluation comes later.”

Groups use sticky notes and are reminded:

- quantity over quality
- no early evaluation
- build on each other’s ideas

Step 2: Clustering and sense-making

Participants group their ideas into themes such as:

- communication routines
- shared tools or templates
- roles and responsibilities
- agreements or protocols
- feedback loops or review processes

The facilitator helps summarize patterns and invites a quick group vote, optionally through Mentimeter, to select one or two ideas for prototyping.

4. Rapid prototyping of collaboration routines

Duration: 30 Minutes

The facilitator explains that the goal is not perfection but a simple, testable prototype.

Possible prototype formats:

- joint check-in routine
- shared checklist
- memorandum of understanding (MoU)
- workflow diagram

Each group chooses one format and creates a prototype. Since this might be the first time the participants need to create such a routine, the templates for the routine are provided in the Material section.

Prototype development steps (participants can use a worksheet template provided):

- Define **purpose**: What problem does this tool solve? Why is it needed?
- Define **roles**: Who is involved? Who leads? Who supports? How are the young person and family included?
- Define **steps or sections**: What happens first, next, and last? What information flows between whom? How often does this happen?

Check inclusion and neuroaffirmative quality: How does this routine ensure the neurodivergent young person is heard without being overburdened? Is the language clear? Is flexibility built in? Are different communication styles respected?

The facilitator supports equal participation with co-creation prompts such as:

“Great idea. Who can build on that?”

“What would make this easier to use in practice?”

“How can we make sure the young person is included meaningfully?”

For groups that need more structure, sentence starters can be offered:

“The first step is...”

“If that does not work, we...”

“We review this routine every...”

Evaluation of the lesson

Duration: 20–25 Minutes

Materials: Mentimeter access, participants' prototypes, optional reflection sheet

Objective and Content:

The evaluation invites participants to consolidate learning, recognize useful ideas from other groups, and identify opportunities to apply the new routines in practice.

1. Plenary sharing

Each group has 3–4 minutes to present:

- the scenario they worked on
- the main collaboration problem they identified
- their prototype and how it works

The facilitator keeps presentations brief and visible. During sharing, participants respond to a Mentimeter question such as:

"What is one element from this prototype that you like or could use?"

The results can be displayed as a word cloud or poll.

2. Collective reflection

Participants respond to two final Mentimeter open questions:

What is one insight you are taking from this session about cross-sectional collaboration?

Where could you test one of these routines in the next three months?

The facilitator reads selected responses aloud and connects them back to the session objectives:

- participants practiced co-design
- they worked in diverse teams
- they used collective intelligence
- they created inclusive and neuroaffirmative routines

3. Closing

The facilitator closes the session by acknowledging participants' contributions

Suggested closing statement:

"Thank you for contributing. Today we saw how collective intelligence grows when we share power and ideas openly."

References

Rosenberg, M. B. (2003). Nonviolent communication: A language of life (2nd ed.). PuddleDancer Press.

[https://ccpgc.usmf.md/sites/default/files/inline-files/Nonviolent%20Communication %20A%20Language%20of%20Life %20Life-Changing%20Tools%20for%20Healthy%20Relationships%20%28%20PDFDrive%20%29.pdf](https://ccpgc.usmf.md/sites/default/files/inline-files/Nonviolent%20Communication%20A%20Language%20of%20Life%20Life-Changing%20Tools%20for%20Healthy%20Relationships%20%28%20PDFDrive%20%29.pdf)

Sanders, E. B.-N., & Stappers, P. J. (2008). Co-creation and the new landscapes of design. CoDesign, 4(1), 5–18.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/15710880701875068>

CAST. (2018). Universal design for learning guidelines version 2.2.

<http://udlguidelines.cast.org>

Council of Europe. (2015). Revised European charter on the participation of young people in local and regional life. <https://rm.coe.int/1680702379>

IDEO. (2015). The field guide to human-centered design.

https://d1r3w4d5z5a88i.cloudfront.net/assets/guide/Field%20Guide%20to%20Human-Centered%20Design_IDEOorg_English-0f60d33bce6b870e7d80f9cc1642c8e7.pdf

Learning material

All worksheet templates: <https://canva.link/rdk69vt0unxjk30>

Prototype formats: <https://canva.link/12sk3cs4puymjs66>

Presentation slides: <https://canva.link/qa3rv7c9a7ztl4z>



Module 4 Practical tools for neurodivergence advocacy and resilience

Learning Objective

This module introduces and tests practical, ND-inclusive tools that support neurodivergent young people and youth workers in expressing needs, understanding democratic processes, and planning small-scale advocacy actions.

Participants reflect on what neurodivergent advocacy means to them and use a simple storytelling framework to turn lived experiences into clear advocacy messages. They then build on these stories using visual tools to identify decision-makers, plan realistic actions, and map opportunities for influence.

Content

Participants will express personal or community experiences related to ND advocacy using accessible, low-pressure methods.

Participants will use simple, structured, ND-inclusive tools to develop advocacy messages and small-scale action plans.

Participants will identify key actors, allies, and barriers within democratic or institutional systems.

Participants will provide feedback on the usability and accessibility of the tools to support improvements to the NeuroDem methodology and training programme.

1 Settling in - Sensory Check

Goal: Create a safe, predictable, and accessible environment

Outcome: Participants understand how the session will work

Duration: 15 Minutes

Materials required

- Visual agenda (slide or printed)
- Optional: paper, markers, quiet corner

Instructions for implementation

- Allow participants a brief moment to re-settle after the break or previous session.
- You can say: "Welcome back. Take a moment to settle in. There's no need to rush."
- Once most participants are present, introduce the session structure: "Before we begin, I'll walk you through what we'll be doing today, so you know what to expect."
- Briefly present the agenda and the flow of activities.
- Then clearly explain participation guidelines: "You are free to participate in ways that work for you. That can mean speaking, writing, drawing, or simply observing."
"You can move around, take breaks, or step out at any time."
"Sharing is always optional."
- Pause for 1–2 minutes to allow participants to settle.

2 Icebreaker: Where do we stand?

Goal: Explore different perspectives in the room

Outcome: Participants see diversity of experiences

Duration: 15 Minutes

Materials required

- Space in the room marked:
 - Strongly Agree
 - Strongly Disagree
 - Middle = Unsure

Instructions for implementation

- Introduce the activity as a positioning exercise, not a debate.
- State clearly: "This is about noticing perspectives, not being right or wrong."
- The Rules: "You will hear a statement. Take a few seconds to think. Position yourself in the room based on how much you agree or disagree. Movement is flexible: stand anywhere, stay in between, or choose not to move at all and note your position privately. Sharing is voluntary. You are not required to explain your position."
- Read the statements slowly. Allow 30 seconds of "thinking/moving" time per statement.

Statements

- Young people are meaningfully involved in decision-making in my community.'
- Advocacy is accessible for neurodivergent young people.'
- Youth workers in my country are well equipped to support neurodivergent youth in advocacy processes.
- Neurodivergent young people are often spoken about, but rarely spoken with.
- To influence policy, you need to be confident and outspoken.
- Communication differences are often misinterpreted as lack of engagement.

Wrap-up

- Bring the group back together.
- Say: "We can see that there are different perspectives and experiences in the room. These differences are important, because they shape how advocacy is understood and practiced."
- Allow a short reflection: "You can take a moment to notice if any statement feels particularly relevant or challenging for you."
- Briefly connect to the next session: "In the next activities, we'll explore tools that help make advocacy more accessible and more participatory for neurodivergent young people."

3 To me, advocacy is...

Goal: Build shared understanding

Outcome: Group-generated definition of advocacy

Duration

- 20 Minutes

Materials required

- Mentimeter OR sticky notes + flipchart

Instructions for implementation

- Share the Mentimeter link or QR code with participants.
- Ask participants to add 1–3 short ideas (keywords or short phrases) about what neurodivergent advocacy means to them.
- Allow 2–3 minutes for responses.
- Ask participants to silently read the responses (1 minute).

- Invite participants to identify patterns by asking: "What themes do you notice?"
- Write the emerging themes on a flipchart.
- Group the themes together into three categories:
 - Personal
 - Community
 - Systems

Wrap up

- "We've just proven that advocacy isn't a one-size-fits-all definition. It ranges from how we ask for a sensory break (Personal) to how we change local laws (Systems)."
- Briefly connect to the next session: However, a definition without a plan is just a wish. To move from these keywords to real-world impact, we need a structure. We are now going to take 'vague' ideas and put them into the Advocacy Canvas to make them a reality."

4 Advocacy Canvas

Goal: To define a clear and realistic advocacy goal.

Outcome: Participants create a one-page advocacy roadmap.

Duration: 30 Minutes

Materials required

- Printed Advocacy Canvas
- Example of completed canvas
- Markers

Instructions for implementation



Facilitator Guidance: Participants often stay too abstract here. Your role is to encourage them gently toward specificity.

- Introduce the tool: "We're now moving from ideas to action. This canvas helps you turn a general concern into a concrete goal."
- Explain focus: "Try to focus more on the solution than the problem."
"A strong goal is something that someone else can clearly understand and act on. You can focus on a topic that is relevant to you, your work, or use a fictional example."
- Encourage participants to work:
 - Individually
 - in pairs
 - or digitally
- Walk around and support where needed.
- If participants are too vague, guide them: "What would change in practice if this worked?"
- At the end, invite optional sharing: "If you'd like, you can share your goal with the group."
- Wrap up: "You now have a North Star. Every tool we use for the rest of the day is designed specifically to reach this goal."

Break - 15 Minutes

5 The iceberg of change

Goal: Identify root causes and structural solutions.

Purpose: To shift from surface-level problems to deeper system understanding.

Duration: 40 Minutes



Materials required

- Printed Iceberg Diagram Templates
- Pens/markers

Instructions for implementation

- Introduce the concept: "Sometimes we focus only on what we see - the visible problem. In this activity, we will look at: what is causing it and what could change it".
- Pause. "The iceberg is a way to explore that. The tip is what we see. The larger part below represents the causes and patterns that create that situation."
- Clarify the task: "We are not listing more problems. We are trying to understand what needs to change so the problem stops happening."
- Guide Step 1: "Take the issue you defined in the Advocacy Canvas. Write it at the top."
- Guide Step 2: "Ask yourself: what is causing this? This can be: a rule, a habit, a lack of support or how things are usually done."
- Guide Step 3: "For each cause, write one thing that could improve the situation."
- Give example: "If meetings are too loud, the issue might be lack of sensory guidelines. A solution could be introducing quiet meeting practices."
- Invite optional sharing.

6 The Power Map

Goal : Identify who is responsible for the change and how to reach them.

Outcome: A strategic placement of stakeholders based on their ability to act.

Duration: 30 Minutes

Materials required

- Individual A4 Power Map grids.
- Markers/pens.

Instructions for implementation

- Introduce: "Now that you know what you want to change, the next question is: who can actually make that change happen?"
- Continue: "Advocacy is not just about having a good idea—it's about understanding who holds decision-making power."
- Define key terms: "Stakeholders are people or organisations who are connected to your issue. They can: make decisions, influence decisions or be affected by the change."
- Guide participants: "Start by identifying one key person who could say yes to your idea."
- Then: "Now think about who influences that person."
- Emphasize: "Focus on people you can realistically reach or influence, directly or indirectly. This can include:
 - people in your organisation
 - local actors
 - community members
 - partners or networks

You can include larger institutions, but also think about who connects you to them."

7 My advocacy operating system

Goal: Design sustainable and accessible ways of working (individually or with others)

Purpose: To prevent burnout and support sustainable advocacy, whether working independently or with others.

Duration: 30 Minutes

Materials required

- My Neurodivergent Advocacy Operating System Checklist, printed
- Markers/pens.

Instructions for implementation

- Introduce: "Advocacy is not a one-time action. It can happen over time, either individually or together with others. You do not have to work in a group for your advocacy to be valid. This activity helps you define how you want to work - on your own, with others, or a mix of both."
- Explain: "That means how you organise your work becomes important - including how you communicate, set boundaries, and collaborate if you choose to."
- Guide: "Instead of general ideas like 'be inclusive,' try to define specific actions."
- Give examples:
 - "I send agendas 48 hours in advance."
 - "I allow written contributions."
 - "I work independently and share updates when ready."

- "I communicate in writing instead of meetings."

Break - 15 Minutes

8 Storytelling for Advocacy

Goal: Create a simple and understandable advocacy message.

Purpose: To support participants in expressing their ideas in a way that others can understand and respond to.

Duration: 30 Minutes

Materials required

- Storytelling for Advocacy Templates, printed
- Markers/pens.

Instructions for implementation

- Introduce: "Even strong ideas benefit from being communicated in a simple and understandable way."
- Explain: "You can use a simple structure to help organise your message, for example:
 - what is happening
 - why it matters to you
 - what could improve
 - what you would like to happen next"
- Emphasize: "This is not about writing a perfect message. A simple, approximate version is enough."

- Give contrast: "For example, you can make your message more specific if it feels helpful: instead of 'we need support,' you could say 'we would like support to provide sensory tools.'"

Achievement: Participants leave with a Ready-to-Use Communication Tool.

Evaluation of the lesson

Duration: 15 Minutes

- Invite participants to take a few minutes for reflection. Participants can: write, think quietly, or note key ideas in their own way.
- They can use these prompts if helpful:
 - "What is one tool you would realistically use?"
 - "What is one thing you would adapt?"
- Allow quiet time.
- Invite optional sharing.
- Close: "Thank you for your work today. You explored different ways to approach advocacy, and you can adapt these tools to fit your own context and way of working."

Learning material

[Advocacy Canvas Template](#)

[Completed Canvas Example](#)

[Iceberg Diagram Template](#)

[Power Map Grid](#)

[My Neurodivergent Advocacy Operating System Checklist](#)

[Storytelling for Advocacy Template](#)

Module 5 Methods of Co-Creation

Learning Objective

The Co-Creation Module introduces inclusive, participatory design practices for working with neurodivergent youth in democratic and advocacy contexts. Drawing on Social Innovation Education, participatory design, and the NeuroDem framework, it uses hands-on activities to show how diverse stakeholders can co-create solutions.

Participants explore communication barriers, inclusive tools, advocacy supports, and collaboration strategies, and practice turning real challenges into ND-friendly interventions. The module emphasises shared power, accessibility, iterative learning, and ethical facilitation.

Content

Participants will understand and apply core co-design principles in group settings. They will work effectively in diverse teams, value different perspectives, and use collective intelligence methods to generate and refine shared solutions.

Participants will gain practical experience in collaborative creation, strengthen skills in shared decision-making, and build confidence in facilitating inclusive, respectful team processes. They will also develop ready-to-use co-design approaches for use in NeuroDem Labs and training contexts.

1 What is Co-Creation?

Duration

45–50 minutes

Materials required

Sticky notes, Markers / pens

Theoretical Background

Co-creation is a collaborative process where people design ideas together, valuing different perspectives, to allow for democratic participation and inclusive engagement.

Instructions for implementation

Step 1: Introduction (10 min)

Co-creation means working together with others to create something instead of doing it alone. Everyone shares ideas, gives input, and helps shape the final result.

In simple words: *It's when people team up and build something together.*

Some Real-life examples

1. Customers helping design a product

A company asks customers what features they want in a new phone or app. The final product is based on their ideas. > The company and customers *co-create* the product.

2. Students and teacher planning a lesson

Instead of the teacher deciding everything, students suggest topics or activities.> The lesson is created together.

3. Team project at work

Different team members share ideas and skills to build a project (like a campaign or product). > Everyone contributes to the final result.

Step 2: Exploration (*let participants choose format that fits them better*)

Option A – Individual (quiet processing)

Participants write/draw what co-creation means to them on their own and the facilitator collects anonymous answers.

Option B – Small group (2-3 people)

Discuss: “When have you worked with others successfully?”. Use structured turn-taking

Option C – Mixed

Start individually → *share your thoughts if comfortable* Sharing is not mandatory. Participants, if they like, they can share by speaking, written notes, drawing or the facilitator reads anonymous answers

2 Co-creation in Practice

Duration

45 + 45 minutes (with break)

Materials required

Scenario cards

Theoretical Background

Co-creation of solutions supports participation and shared decision-making.

Instructions for implementation

Step 1: Choose a challenge (5–10 min)

Participants pick or are given a scenario (example [cards](#)) either for inspiration to imagine other real-life problems for solving or choose their own.

Step 2: Idea development (flexible modes)

Option A – Solo path

Fill in template:

Problem

Idea

Who benefits

Can draw instead of write

Option B – Pair work

One person speaks, one writes/draws. You can swap roles if it's comfortable.

Option C – Group work

Assign roles:

When working together it is helpful if you want to assign roles to each member of the group like (consult the group before):

Idea generator

Organizer

Visual creator

Timekeeper

Step 3: Output creation (15–20 min)

Participants can create:

1. Poster
2. short text
3. visual map
4. audio explanation

Step 4: Sharing (*optional & flexible*)

You can create a walk-through Gallery (no speaking required) with Anonymous display or if comfortable generate small-group sharing instead of plenary.

3 Co-Creation in Action

Duration

45+20 minutes (with break in between)

Materials required

- Action planning template
- Example advocacy ideas

Theoretical Background

This connects co-creation to self-empowerment, democratic participation and creating real-life impact for yourself but also others.

Instructions for implementation

Step 1: Inspiration (10 min)

In this section participants are encouraged to design their own campaign and discuss possible synergies with people outside their group to achieve their goal, raise awareness about their issue, or communicate their

solution. Show simple examples of campaigns that raise awareness on either neurodiversity everyday-life (or other issues from previous activity) and raise awareness about problems but also solutions (*each trainer here may share local campaigns as examples*):

<https://www.dandad.org/work/d-ad-awards-archive/me-my-autism-i>

<https://www.neurodiversityweek.com/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sMn2o9EYa08>

Step 2: Plan an action

Option A – Individual

- Design your own action- or use the ones from the previous activity

Option B – Group

- Co-create one shared action (co-decide with your group what kind of action you want to promote, campaign for according to your shared needs) or use the material from the previous activity.

You can use this Action Planner [template](#) to guide the discussion

Step 3: Reflection (low-pressure)

Participants choose how to reflect:

emoji scale 😊 😐 😞

short sentence

drawing

Evaluation of the lesson

Give participants multiple ways to share feedback and let them choose what feels comfortable. [Templates](#) for downloading.

Option 1: Visual Scale (Low-demand, non-verbal)

Provide a simple visual (paper or board):

- Energy: ☐☐☐☐☐ (low → high)
- Comfort: ☐☐☐☐☐
- Understanding: ☐☐☐☐☐

Participants can:

- Circle
- Color
- Place a sticker
- Point (if done together)

No writing required.

Option 2: Quick Reflection Prompts

Provide small cards or a sheet with:

- One thing I liked: _____
- One thing I would change: _____

Participants can: Write words, draw, or use symbols

Option 3: Anonymous Feedback Box

- Provide blank cards + a box/envelope
- Participants can submit anonymously
- Accept drawings, keywords, or even blank cards

Learning material

[Scenario Cards](#)

[Action Planner Template](#)



[Evaluation Options](#)

[Other co-creation options to explore as a trainer](#)

