

Supporting Regulation Through Neuroaffirming Care

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Enhancing autonomy, identifying personal needs and self-regulating are crucial in supporting the well-being of autistic and/or neurodivergent people. It is important to understand that emotional and sensory regulation plays an important role in maintaining a daily state of balanced mental health and a positive mindset.

Regulation

Regulation is a person's ability to modulate an emotional state and adopt behavioural and physiological responses adapted to the given context and objectives. Regulation can be challenging for many autistic and/or neurodivergent people as they are particularly sensitive to emotional overload (when there is excessive emotional stimulus that the brain is no longer able to sort) and sensory overload (when there is more sensory input than the brain can process). These two types of overloads can occur simultaneously, which makes it even more challenging for the brain to process. The emotional overload can amplify the sensory overload and vice-versa, raising the level of dysregulation.

Dysregulation

In this context, dysregulation refers to difficulty managing intense or painful emotions and/or sensations. The person in this state might engage in extreme, self-damaging or unreasonable behaviours in response to the situation, even acting against their own interests (i.e., outbursts of anger or aggression, panic attacks, etc.).

How Can We Provide Support?

Provide support in a flexible and suitable manner. While the goal is regulation, this is not always possible for the autistic and/or neurodivergent person when they are dealing with sensory or emotional overload. This is where co-regulation can help.

Co-Regulation

Co-regulation is a process through which children develop the ability to soothe and manage distressing emotions and sensations through a nurturing and reliable connection with primary caregivers. It can also be practiced with adolescents and adults through positive behaviour modelling. Co-regulation can help reduce the level of distress and facilitate a return to a balanced and calm state, which is the first step towards self-regulation.



Neurodiversity Affirmative Approach

The neurodiversity affirmative approach provides a framework and intervention philosophy based on the acknowledgement of the incredible diversity of neurotypes and the uniqueness of each person's brain function. This approach emphasizes that neurological variations are natural. The concept of neuroaffirming care is relatively new and constantly evolving.

The main aspects of this approach include:

- Developing each person's abilities
- Encouraging autonomy
- Providing customized support, including appropriate communication
- Reducing the stigma surrounding neurodiversity

The basis of neuroaffirming care is the unequivocal respect of the autistic and/or neurodivergent person's boundaries. As they regularly face various forms of discrimination and micro-aggression, it is essential to encourage them to identify and set boundaries. Of the other strategies to prioritize, we should highlight helping the neurodivergent person explore, recognize and identify their baseline, their activation states and the sensations in their body, and based on the identified needs, target the reduction or increase of stimuli.

As a parent, caregiver or professional, taking into consideration the neurodiversity affirmative approach, it is essential that we maintain an awareness of our own biases as a neurotypical person and take the time to assess whether what we are proposing is helpful. It is paramount to exercise flexibility and recognize that the person is the expert on what is going on in their head and body. Ensuring that the suggested interventions and supports consider each person's uniqueness by providing support adapted to the needs and realities of the autistic and/or neurodivergent person allows us to honour their autonomy, their right to self-determination and their integrity.

To learn more about this topic, watch the webinar '[Supporting Regulation Through Neuroaffirming Care](#)' with Kathleen Patterson.

