

Neurological Differences & Broad Challenges

NEUROLOGICAL DIFFERENCES

Neurodiversity

An approach to learning that neurological differences (see the various diagnosis below) are recognized and respected as any other human variation. Whether we have a diagnosis or not, all of our brains work differently. We have traits, abilities, and preferences based on how our brains are wired that make us good at and good for certain things.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

ASSETS & TRAITS

- Concentration/hyper focus on particular interests
- Fine detail processing
- Sequencing
- Creativity
- Hypersensitivity: all of their senses are extremely sensitive

HOW YOUNG STORYTELLERS CAN BE A GOOD FIT FOR THESE TYPES OF WRITERS:

- Theatre games can help them understand other perspectives as they sometimes struggle with understanding multiple perspectives.
- Theatre concentration games can help prepare them to focus on the task at hand.

TIPS

- Frequent short breaks can help them focus.
- Since their senses are extremely sensitive, it can be hard for them to focus in an overly stimulating environment. You can use headphones to mute noises, or cover posters and other visually stimulating things in the room.
- If they are fixating on something off topic, praise them for their interest and knowledge, but let them know that they have an important goal/task that they need to accomplish. Give them a specific amount of time to talk about their topic of interest. Time them or they can time themselves to give them more control over the situation.
- Provide a highly structured environment.
- Introduce the plan for the day to set expectations.
- Write agenda/goals up on the board.
- Post agreements where students can see them.
- Alert students of any changes to the routine ASAP.
- Give students a preview of the plan for the upcoming week.
- When transitioning to a new task:
 - Let them preview the plan of what's coming.
 - Provide multiple reminders when transitioning to a new activity.

Dyslexia

ASSETS & TRAITS

- Strong visual thinkers
- High creative ability
- Strong intuition
- Have challenges matching letters to sounds/sounding out words. That is why they often have trouble reading and spelling

HOW YOUNG STORYTELLERS CAN BE A GOOD FIT FOR THESE TYPES OF WRITERS:

- We give them an opportunity to express their story / write ideas without actually having to write.
- Mentors can help them read over materials and write / type for the student.

TIPS

- Sometimes students have low confidence around writing and believe they cannot write/have a negative association with the word “write”. You can call writing something else, like “authoring”.
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Attention-Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

ASSETS & TRAITS

- High creative ability
- Novel thinking
- Lots of energy & passion
- Curious
- Hyposensitivity - all senses are less sensitive and are often drawn to highly stimulating things
- They may have difficulty paying attention, and appear overactive or impulsive
- Often have a strong need and desire to move

HOW YOUNG STORYTELLERS CAN BE A GOOD FIT FOR THESE TYPES OF WRITERS:

- We appeal to their desire for stimuli through interactive games and one on one interactions.

TIPS

- They might need additional sensory supports like holding a stress or Koosh ball.
- If they need to move, they can walk around while writing or use fidget toy (might seem like a distraction at first, but these supports help students focus).
- Find ways to focus their energy into productive tasks like giving them leadership opportunities in sessions.

Selective Mutism

ASSETS & TRAITS

- Might not want to speak in various types of situations or to adults/peers/new people
- Might only speak to their mentor but not the larger group
- Might be a strong visual thinker
- May have a rich intrapersonal life
- Might want non verbal options when asked to respond to a question or prompt

HOW YOUNG STORYTELLERS CAN BE A GOOD FIT FOR THESE TYPES OF WRITERS:

- Young Storytellers mentors can find individualized modes of communication that appeal to them.

TIPS

- Find ways for them to respond to prompts through hand signals/written responses.
- Give them additional time to respond.
- Let them know that you value them and what they have to contribute, so you will wait for them to be ready to share.
- Head Mentors and mentors can model sharing first.
- Prepare them to verbally share by giving them reminders, examples, and time to rehearse their responses.
- Just because a student is silent, don't make assumptions about them.

BROAD CHALLENGES

(THAT STUDENTS WITH OR WITHOUT A DIAGNOSIS MIGHT HAVE)

When you do come across behavior that can be seen as disruptive or challenging for the group, keep in mind that:

- Every single behavior serves a purpose and is a form of communication. A writer may be doing something in order to meet a need they have due to their diagnosis. The behavior could be a signal that a writer needs additional support.
- It can take time to figure out what a behavior is communicating. Be patient and keep on observing.

Cognitive Challenges

MIGHT NEED ASSISTANCE WITH:

- Guidance around where to focus their attention (all sounds and visuals can seem big and important)
- Processing language and instructions
- Understanding multiple perspectives
- Planning and carrying out complex tasks
- Finding ways to adapt a task to meet their needs
- Finding alternative ways to share and show what they have learned

TIPS

- Help students direct their attention by using a whiteboard / giant Post-it pad to teach.
- Utilize a Koosh ball to direct attention to whom we should be listening to.
- Slow down your pace, give them additional wait time, and repeat information often.
- Use literal language as students can be confused by metaphors.
- Break down large tasks into smaller steps and have them practice multiple times.

Social Challenges

MIGHT NEED ASSISTANCE WITH:

- Less/no eye contact (can be physically painful for them)
- More/less personal space
- Assistance with discussing and connecting with others over age appropriate topics
- More guidance on how to interact with the group and their mentor

TIPS

- Give them sentence starters to guide them during group and mentor interactions.
- Give them time to practice and plan out what they want to share.

Communication Challenges

MIGHT NEED ASSISTANCE WITH:

- Coming up with alternative ways to express themselves
- Interacting with peers
- Understanding multiple perspectives, emotions, and body language

TIPS

- Work with them to develop non-verbal cues and gestures they can use to participate in sessions.
 - Use theatre games and exercises to help them understand the perspectives of others and to identify emotions.
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Anxiety

MIGHT NEED ASSISTANCE WITH:

- Talking through their perspective on things that upset them and developing strategies to deal with those things
- Creating a consistent and structured environment
- Building confidence around things that make them anxious

TIPS

- Let them know that we are here for them and can schedule extra writing time to help them complete their scripts.
- Don't connect productivity with a value. Remind the group that we all complete things at different rates. Feeling "behind" can trigger anxiety.
- Create and share "Social Stories."
 - A short story about something that might trigger anxiety that acknowledges their feelings but also introduces strategies that can help them feel supported and successful.