



# Neurodiverse Brains: Understanding Differences, Empowering Potential

**Breakout Sessions Round 1 (Choose 1)**

**1:00pm – 2:00pm**

Session Title	Session Description
<p><b>ADHD and Neurodiversity</b> Dr. Mark Reinecke</p>	<p>For many years, ADHD was believed to affect only young boys who were restless, unable to sit still, and frequently disruptive in classrooms. Today, we recognize that ADHD presents with more varied symptoms and can occur across the lifespan. The rates of diagnosis have increased significantly, rising 60% between 2020 and 2022 in the United States. Additionally, ADHD symptoms often overlap with a range of other conditions, including autism, learning disabilities, anxiety, and depression, raising questions about the traditional binary model of diagnosis. A more nuanced perspective suggests that ADHD is better understood as a convergence of multiple neurocognitive systems—such as attention regulation, novelty seeking, reward processing, and executive functioning—each with unique biological underpinnings and developmental trajectories. Rather than a singular disorder, ADHD can be viewed as a multifaceted constellation of traits, with individuals experiencing diverse manifestations depending on their unique neurocognitive profile.</p> <p>In this break-out session, we will explore this evolving framework for understanding ADHD and discuss its implications for treatment, education, and career planning. While medication management remains beneficial for some, a broader approach that includes environmental adjustments, strengths-based interventions, and strategies to minimize cognitive overload may support better outcomes. Recognizing ADHD within a neurodiversity framework allows for a more personalized approach, acknowledging that individuals with ADHD have unique abilities and challenges that can be accommodated to help them achieve success and fulfillment in various aspects of life.</p>

Session Title	Session Description
<p data-bbox="121 175 480 354"> <b>Embracing Diversity: Affirming and Supporting Neurodivergent LGBTQ+ Lives</b> Dr. Pete Myers </p>	<p data-bbox="520 175 2007 646"> The intersection of LGBTQ+ identities and autism has garnered increasing attention in recent years, as emerging research suggests that there may be a higher prevalence of autism spectrum conditions among transgender and gender-diverse individuals compared to the general population. Several studies have indicated that autistic traits or a diagnosis of autism may co-occur with gender dysphoria, suggesting a complex interplay between neurodevelopmental factors and gender identity development. This convergence raises essential questions about the underlying neurobiological and psychosocial mechanisms that contribute to both conditions and the implications for clinical assessment and support. The social and political landscape surrounding transgender and neurodivergent individuals is shifting rapidly, marked by both increasing visibility and intensified debates over rights, representation, and access to essential services. While advocacy efforts have led to greater recognition and support, legislative challenges and societal resistance continue to shape the lived experiences of these communities, highlighting the urgent need for inclusive policies and affirming spaces. Understanding this intersection is critical, as it can inform more nuanced, empathetic, affirming, and strength-based approaches for individuals who navigate both identities. </p> <p data-bbox="520 688 2007 1013"> This presentation intends to share both research and shared lived experiences to explore the developmental paths and clinical needs of those at the crossroads of autism and transgender identity. For instance, research has highlighted that the unique social communication challenges associated with neurodivergence might influence the way gender identity is experienced and expressed, for example, the potentially complex and complicated understanding of gender dysphoria. Furthermore, it is more apparent with time that traditional therapeutic and support models may require adaptation to address the specific needs of these individuals. As the field advances, further interdisciplinary studies will be essential to develop evidence-based interventions that are sensitive to the dual needs of autistic and transgender individuals, ensuring that both neurodevelopmental and gender-related aspects are holistically addressed. </p>
<p data-bbox="113 1091 489 1156"> <b>Empowering Autistic Adults</b> Alison Carris </p>	<p data-bbox="520 1091 2007 1237"> As awareness of autism continues to grow, so does the understanding that traditional approaches often overlook the diverse needs and strengths of autistic adults. Research emphasizes that shifting from deficit-based models to affirming approaches fosters acceptance, autonomy, and emotional well-being. By supporting self-advocacy and meaningful connections, neuroaffirming care promotes greater inclusion and quality of life. </p> <p data-bbox="520 1279 2007 1383"> This session, designed for parents, community members, and support professionals, will explore strategies for creating inclusive environments. how neuroaffirming care has the capacity to celebrate the unique strengths and perspectives of autistic individuals while addressing their diverse needs with </p> <p data-bbox="520 1425 2007 1562"> compassion and respect. Attendees will gain insights into creating environments that prioritize acceptance, autonomy, and well-being, by encouraging meaningful connections, supporting emotional well-being, and teaching self-advocacy skills. Together, we can build a world that uplifts and values every member of our community. </p>

<p><b>Language Matters</b>  Claudia Hypes  Addie Van Zwoil</p>	<p>Language Matters emphasizes the critical role of word choice and its impact on identity, safety, and belongingness. Research indicates that language usage, including the distinction between person-first and identity-first language, can influence how individuals are perceived, supported, and engaged in care. This presentation explores how acts of bias contribute to the stigma associated with language and labels, highlighting the need for thoughtful and respectful communication in schools, the community, and in mental health practice.</p> <p>Attendees will gain skills to differentiate between person-first and identity-first language, exploring the diverse preferences within neurodivergent and disability communities. Additionally, this program will equip participants with strategies to determine when to "call in" versus "call out" in addressing harmful language, behaviors, and biases. By fostering awareness and providing alternatives to stigmatizing jargon while promoting intentional language use, the program empowers participants to cultivate more inclusive and affirming environments and communities.</p>
<p><b>Leveraging Strengths: A Neurodiversity-Informed Approach to Screening and Intervention with Children</b>  Dr. Natalie LaDuke</p>	<p>The session will explore how the neurodiversity approach can reshape screening and intervention practices, particularly for mental health professionals working with children. As discussed by Dwyer (2022), neurodiversity-informed frameworks promote personalized strategies that recognize the individual strengths of neurodiverse children, rather than merely focusing on remediating weaknesses. Through the lens of this approach, participants will learn practical techniques for implementing strengths-based interventions and fostering inclusive classroom teaching practices. Additionally, the session will cover strategies for facilitating student-led IEPs, empowering students to actively participate in their educational planning and advocate for their needs. Tools such as the Social-Emotional Health Survey (SEHS) will be discussed for supporting strengths-based interventions. The presentation will conclude with a case study illustrating how screening and intervention were successfully conducted using the SEHS, highlighting the importance of fostering resilience, well-being, and inclusive educational practices for diverse children.</p>
<p><b>Neurodiversity and Sensory Processing in the Workplace</b>  Olivia Danielson-Veed  Daniel Niewoehner</p>	<p>Creating inclusive environments for neurodivergent individuals presents both challenges and opportunities, particularly given the sensory, cognitive, and social difficulties many face in traditional settings. Research highlights that neurodiverse individuals may experience hypersensitivity or hyposensitivity to auditory, visual, and tactile stimuli, significantly affecting their engagement and productivity. The presentation emphasizes the importance of designing spaces that accommodate various sensory thresholds, incorporating elements such as quiet retreat areas, natural light, and flexible workspaces. Studies show that biophilic design—integrating natural elements into physical spaces—can help mitigate stress and enhance cognitive well-being, ultimately improving overall functionality and comfort for neurodivergent individuals. Additionally, neuroscience research supports the role of structured and adaptable environments in facilitating a state of “flow,” wherein individuals are fully engaged and able to function at their highest capacity.</p>

	<p>HOK proposes various design strategies to foster inclusivity, including sensory zoning, diverse seating options, and adaptable workspaces. Despite their unique strengths and high intelligence, many neurodivergent individuals face employment barriers due to a lack of proper workplace accommodations. The presentation also explores operational and individual-level strategies, such as flexible work policies, awareness training, and task management techniques, to support neurodivergent individuals in both educational and professional settings. Studies suggest that enhancing social inclusion through workplace adjustments and supportive policies significantly improves job satisfaction and well-being. Ultimately, the message is clear: inclusive design extends beyond physical spaces to creating experiences that embrace diversity, enhance productivity, and promote well-being for all.</p>
<p><b>Transition Services: Planning for the Future</b> Emily Wilson</p>	<p>This session will provide an overview of the legal rights of students with disabilities to access appropriate transition services through special education, including a breakdown of an IEP transition plan and key elements families and students should look for in their transition planning process. Research indicates that implementing evidence-based practices in secondary transition planning is crucial for promoting successful outcomes for students with disabilities as they move into post-secondary education and employment. This session will also cover the rights of students transitioning to post-secondary education and employment, including the services available through the Division of Rehabilitation Services and their right to reasonable accommodations in college and workplace settings.</p> <p>Through in-depth discussions of advocacy strategies and practical case studies, participants will be provided with the tools to apply this knowledge to maximize the transition services of students with disabilities and ensure that all students are able to access appropriate transition services, vocational services, and accommodations in the post-secondary setting.</p>

# Neurodiverse Brains: Understanding Differences, Empowering Potential

## Breakout Sessions Round 2 (Choose 1)

2:15pm – 3:15pm

Session Title	Session Description
<p data-bbox="128 354 575 493"><b>Embracing Neurodiversity: Cultivating Inclusive Workplaces and Services</b> Samantha Kolkey</p>	<p data-bbox="621 354 2007 711">As diversity, equity, and inclusion is finally being prioritized in the workplace, neurodiversity is a natural form of diversity to incorporate into these discussions and policy and workplace cultural shifts. With recent research allowing for more accurate diagnosis of neurodevelopmental disabilities, there are an increasing number of neurodivergent employees and job seekers. Research has shown that neurodivergent employees bring valuable skills and perspectives to workplaces in all industries including increased innovation, creativity, and problem-solving. By creating an inclusive and accommodating workplace culture, organizations, and business can improve employee engagement, motivation, productivity, and retention. In addition, for clinical providers, utilizing a neurodiversity lens and moving towards the social model of disability can support more accurate diagnosing and therefore treatment and long-term positive outcomes for clients.</p> <p data-bbox="621 755 2007 1040">This session will begin with defining terms and a brief historical context of the neurodiversity movement and approach. Neurodivergent and autistic burnout will be defined and differentiated from occupational burnout, and mood disorder and anxiety diagnoses, and how these types of burnout significantly impact a neurodivergent person's success in the workplace. Neurodiversity hiring initiatives will be defined and discussed to support shifting the "traditional" HR lens when it comes to the recruiting, hiring, and retention practices of organizations and businesses. You will walk away with clinical knowledge and practical strategies for establishing policies, procedures, accommodations, and environments that foster neuroinclusive workplaces and services.</p>
<p data-bbox="117 1122 585 1295"><b>Inclusive Mental Health Programming: Adjusting PHP/IOP for Neurodiverse Youth</b> Galina Lipkin Dr. Firuza Aliyeva</p>	<p data-bbox="621 1122 2007 1516">This presentation will explore how to adjust Partial Hospitalization Programs (PHP) and Intensive Outpatient Programs (IOP) to better serve neurodiverse children and adolescents. With an increasing recognition of neurodiversity in mental health, it is crucial that group therapy settings are tailored to meet the specific needs of neurodiverse youth, including those with autism, ADHD, learning disabilities, and other cognitive or developmental differences. Research highlights that identity-affirming mental health treatment significantly improves engagement and outcomes for neurodivergent individuals by creating environments that validate their experiences and communication styles. By examining the unique challenges and strengths of neurodiverse individuals, we will identify key strategies for modifying group programming to ensure that these youth feel included, understood, and supported. Evidence suggests that adjusting group therapy approaches to align with autistic strengths and cognitive processing styles enhances therapeutic effectiveness.</p>

	<p>Participants will learn practical approaches for creating more inclusive PHP/IOP programming that promotes engagement and therapeutic progress for neurodiverse youth. This includes adjusting communication styles, offering clinically appropriate modifications in the milieu, and implementing individualized supports within a group setting, all of which have been shown to improve mental health outcomes for neurodivergent populations. Additionally, the session will highlight the importance of fostering a positive and validating environment that recognizes the diverse ways neurodiverse youth experience and process emotions, social interactions, and mental health challenges. Through evidence-based strategies and case examples, attendees will gain the tools needed to enhance outcomes and create more equitable mental health programming that acknowledges and supports neurodivergent needs.</p>
<p><b>Mapping the Spectrum: A Historical Journey of Autism Diagnosis and Care</b>  Javier Acevedo-Arus</p>	<p>Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) was first described by Leo Kanner (1943) as a constellation of affective symptoms, including obsessiveness, stereotypy, and echolalia, which are observed since early childhood. Prior to this, similar symptoms were often attributed to schizoid disorders. Over time, the conceptualization of ASD shifted significantly, indicating broader changes in the psychological, medical, and cultural understandings of neurodevelopment. These changes are reflected in the diagnosis, treatment, and language surrounding ASD by providers, patients, and family members alike.</p> <p>The purpose of this presentation is to provide a historical overview of ASD, tracing its diagnostic and treatment history while examining how societal attitudes have influenced and evolved alongside these changes. A central focus of the presentation will be how autism has been assessed clinically in each edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). From the inception of "Infantile Autism" as the first recognized distinct autism disorder in the DSM-III (1980), to the consolidation of Autism Disorder, Asperger's Disorder, and Pervasive Developmental Disorder into Autism Spectrum Disorder in the DSM-5 (2013), ASD research and treatment continues to evolve.</p>
<p><b>Reimagining Parenting: Navigating Family Life with Neurodiverse Children</b>  Lynn Denton</p>	<p>This presentation is targeted to parents of neurodiverse children, as well as therapists and educators who support them. Often, the parenting approaches that parents initially envision may not be effective for a neurodivergent child. Research highlights that parenting stress is significantly higher in families of children with neurodevelopmental disorders, which can impact both parental well-being and the effectiveness of parenting strategies. By understanding how their child presents and responds to different environments, parents can adopt alternative approaches that are more successful in meeting their child's needs. When parents feel supported and informed, they are better equipped to foster an environment where their child feels understood, secure, and emotionally regulated.</p> <p>Additionally, when a family includes one or more neurodivergent children, family dynamics may not function as parents initially expected. Everyday activities, such as taking a vacation or going out to dinner, can present unexpected challenges that require adjustment and flexibility. Research suggests that peer support networks can play a critical role in helping parents navigate these challenges by providing</p>

	<p>shared experiences, emotional support, and practical strategies for family engagement. The impact on siblings must also be recognized, as they may experience shifts in family attention and expectations. This presentation will provide suggestions for parenting neurodivergent children, along with strategies for adapting family interactions to enhance overall well-being and enjoyment.</p>
<p><b>The Intersection of Neurodivergence &amp; Increased Risk Factors for Youth</b>  Bryant Laiche  Randyl Wilkins</p>	<p>Neurodivergence, which includes conditions like attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism, and others, often co-occurs with substance use disorder (SUD). Research indicates that individuals with ADHD have a high comorbidity rate with SUD, as both conditions share underlying neurobiological factors. The stress and stigma faced by neurodivergent individuals can further increase their vulnerability to substance use as a coping mechanism. Additionally, parenting stress in families of neurodivergent children can impact the support systems available to them, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to reduce risk factors.</p> <p>Effective support systems and resources are essential for addressing co-occurring neurodivergence and SUD. This workshop will define neurodivergence, examine the role of stress and stigma in substance use risk, and explore strategies for fostering protective factors. Peer support among families of neurodivergent individuals has been shown to improve coping and resilience, underscoring the importance of creating inclusive, positive environments. By implementing evidence-based interventions, professionals and caregivers can help neurodivergent youth develop healthier coping strategies, reducing the likelihood of substance use.</p>
<p><b>The Power of Authenticity: Cultivating Culturally Informed Connections in Neurodivergent Communities</b>  Sharde' O'Rourke</p>	<p>This presentation explores the intersection of authenticity, cultural awareness, and effective communication within neurodivergent communities. Attendees will gain a deeper understanding of how cultural and neurodivergent identities influence communication styles, behaviors, and self-expression, shaping social interactions and personal experiences. Research highlights the importance of culturally relevant pedagogy in supporting neurodiverse individuals, ensuring that educational and community environments foster inclusivity and validation. Additionally, studies suggest that early intervention and research within neurodivergent communities must be approached with an awareness of potential biases and conflicts of interest, reinforcing the need for authentic, evidence-based practices that prioritize the lived experiences of neurodivergent individuals.</p> <p>The session will provide evidence-based strategies for mental health professionals and community advocates to foster authentic relationships that validate neurodivergent experiences while respecting cultural diversity. By incorporating culturally informed practices, professionals can enhance the effectiveness of interventions and communication approaches. This aligns with research indicating that psychological theories and intervention strategies must evolve to reflect neurodivergent voices and perspectives. Participants will leave with practical tools to create inclusive spaces, ensuring that neurodivergent individuals are empowered to navigate their personal and professional lives with authenticity and confidence.</p>

# Neurodiverse Brains: Understanding Differences, Empowering Potential

Breakout Sessions Round 3 (Choose 1)

3:30pm – 4:30pm

Session Title	Session Description
<p data-bbox="121 386 508 602"><b>Accommodations and Beyond: A People-First Workplace Inclusion System By and For Neurodivergent Employees</b> Robin Kacyn</p>	<p data-bbox="548 386 1990 784">We like to say that we're an accommodating workplace, but that doesn't quite capture the breadth of what we try to do on a regular basis. Many workplaces speak of accommodations as a vague concept but struggle when it comes to actual implementation. Research suggests that successful employment for autistic individuals requires tailored support systems that go beyond basic accommodations, addressing factors such as workplace culture and individualized needs. At Aspiritech, we integrate employee feedback into our accommodation process from the start, beginning with the interview process, to ensure that every individual receives the support they need. Studies show that workplaces that actively involve neurodivergent employees in decision-making regarding accommodations foster greater job satisfaction and overall workplace success. This presentation will highlight our people-first approach, which prioritizes inclusivity and practical, individualized accommodations rather than relying on preconceived notions of what is "best" for neurodivergent individuals.</p> <p data-bbox="548 824 1990 1149">Our ultimate purpose, as well as the focus of this presentation, is to build a world that embraces all neurotypes. Research indicates that social support plays a significant role in the mental health and well-being of autistic individuals, reducing the risk of depression and suicidal ideation. By fostering an environment that values neurodiversity and actively supports employees, we create a model that can be replicated across industries. Contrary to common misconceptions, accommodations are often neither costly nor labor-intensive but make a significant impact on productivity and workplace morale. At Aspiritech, we've created a microcosm of what we hope to see more of in the wider workforce. We look forward to engaging in a broader discussion following this presentation, where we can address concerns, share best practices, and provide insights into how organizations can implement sustainable and effective accommodations.</p>
<p data-bbox="142 1227 487 1295"><b>Nurturing Neurodiversity</b> Brianna Jonathan</p>	<p data-bbox="548 1227 1990 1482">The purpose of this presentation is to focus on building a community that not only supports but nurtures neurodiverse students, faculty, and staff. A strengths-based perspective on neurodiversity will be emphasized, highlighting the unique abilities and contributions of neurodivergent individuals rather than viewing differences as deficits. Research suggests that fostering inclusive environments requires understanding the hidden curriculum—the unspoken social rules and expectations that may pose challenges for neurodiverse individuals, particularly in academic and professional settings. By recognizing these implicit barriers, institutions can create more supportive structures that empower neurodiverse individuals to thrive.</p>



	<p>Content will include a brief overview of different vantage points of neurodiversity, activities that encourage new ways of thinking about neurodivergent individuals, and practical strategies for implementation. These strategies can be applied and adapted to multiple educational and professional settings, helping both students and employees succeed in diverse environments. For instance, explicitly teaching group work expectations can enhance collaboration for neurodivergent students, improving both academic and social outcomes. Similarly, workplaces benefit from structured accommodations and a culture of acceptance, which have been shown to improve productivity and well-being among neurodiverse employees. By incorporating these approaches, institutions can move toward a more inclusive and strengths-focused model that supports neurodiverse individuals across different contexts.</p>
<p><b>On the Crossroads of Neurodiversity and Mental Health</b> Jennifer Gerlach</p>	<p>Neurodiversity has become a widely discussed topic in recent years as awareness of autism, ADHD, and related neurodivergences has grown. The intersection between neurodiversity and mental health is significant, with some researchers considering mental health conditions themselves as manifestations of neurodiversity. Understanding neurodiversity beyond a deficit-based model is essential for fostering well-being and social belonging for neurodivergent individuals. Research highlights that the challenges neurodivergent individuals face are often rooted in societal barriers rather than intrinsic limitations, emphasizing the importance of shifting toward neuroinclusive practices.</p> <p>This workshop will explore what neurodiversity means and how practitioners, families, and community members can support one another at the crossroads of neurodiversity and mental health. By addressing empathy gaps and communication differences, professionals and caregivers can create more supportive environments for neurodivergent individuals. The discussion will also include strategies to promote acceptance and inclusion, helping neurodivergent individuals navigate mental health challenges while leveraging their strengths.</p>
<p><b>Talk Saves Lives: Suicide Prevention Best Practices and Research for Neurodiverse Individuals</b> Mike Bushman</p>	<p>Talk Saves Lives: Suicide Prevention Best Practices and Research for Neurodiverse Individuals explores the general scope of suicide as a leading cause of death, focusing on neurodivergent populations who experience unique risk factors and warning signs. Research indicates that neurodiverse individuals, particularly those with autism and ADHD, face increased vulnerability to suicidal ideation due to heightened social isolation, difficulty accessing mental health care, and the presence of co-occurring psychiatric conditions. Additionally, studies emphasize the role of stressful life events in exacerbating suicidal risk, highlighting the need for early identification and targeted interventions. Gender-diverse neurodivergent individuals are particularly at risk, further underscoring the importance of specialized suicide prevention approaches that account for intersectional identities.</p> <p>This program discusses key efforts to reduce suicide risk among neurodiverse individuals, including education, improved access to adapted screening tools, and individualized safety planning. Research supports the effectiveness of peer support and neurodiversity-affirming mental health care, which can help mitigate the impact of social stigma and communication barriers often faced by neurodivergent individuals.</p>

	<p>in crisis. Additionally, structural changes—such as inclusive policies within healthcare and workplace settings—can improve long-term well-being and decrease crisis episodes. The session will explore these evidence-based strategies, offering practical tools for professionals and communities to create more supportive environments that recognize and address the specific mental health challenges experienced by neurodivergent individuals.</p>
<p><b>The School We Need Now</b>  Dr. Tom Golebiewski  Dr. Tim Dohrer</p>	<p>Schools of the future must be designed with a whole-child perspective, integrating the science of learning with the science of mental health. This approach better prepares students for personal, professional, and societal challenges while enabling educators to stay focused and effective. By fostering positive, engaging school environments, we create spaces that nurture hope and resilience in our communities.</p> <p>This workshop will introduce five key strategies schools can implement to support mental health. According to the World Health Organization, mental health is not merely the absence of illness but a state of well-being in which individuals recognize their abilities, manage life’s stresses, work productively, and contribute to their communities. Defining mental health in this way is the first step toward developing a strong Mental Health Action Plan (MHAP).</p> <p>A successful MHAP requires self-reflection on strengths and challenges, as well as the ability to build resilience in the face of adversity. This workshop will present five essential concepts drawn from neurobiology and the mind-body connection, emphasizing a developmentally informed, whole-child and whole-school framework. Topics include the science of stress, trauma-informed practices, social-emotional learning, and fostering a culture of care through approaches such as Circle Keeping and restorative justice.</p>
<p><b>Trauma and Autism Spectrum Disorder: Beyond the DSM-V</b>  Javier Acevedo-Arus</p>	<p>Autistic individuals navigate the world in unique ways. Similarly, the manner in which autistic people experience and develop trauma-related symptomatology differs from their allistic counterparts. Additionally, autistic people and their families are more likely to suffer victimization throughout their lives, including being 7 times more likely to experience sexual abuse and nearly three times more likely to have encounters with law enforcement. Ultimately, adults with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) find themselves at higher risk of developing posttraumatic stress disorder.</p> <p>This presentation is a comprehensive examination of the current literature on the diagnosis, treatment, and clinical/community considerations for autistic people and their families who have faced trauma. A diagnostic overview of ASD and trauma-related disorders will provide useful discussion regarding differential diagnostic considerations for clinicians in attendance. Given the unique sensory and cognitive presentations of individuals with ASD, a portion of this presentation explores the growing literature on trauma exposure beyond what has traditionally been defined as traumatic per the DSM-V-TR. Notable emphasis is placed on intersectional and biopsychosocial considerations that attendees will carry with them as they interface with prospective autistic patients, clients, and colleagues.</p>