



What does it mean to be neurodivergent?



“**Neurodivergent**” describes someone whose brain learns or processes information differently. This includes students with formal supports and students without who still experience other differences or disabilities. These differences **don’t** limit their strengths, potential, or right to a safe, supportive learning environment. Supporting students with neurodivergence means helping them succeed as they are, not trying to make everyone think, learn, or communicate the same way.

What is bullying, and what are the signs?



Bullying is when someone repeatedly and purposely hurts another person to have power over them. In 2025, **1 in 4** middle schoolers and up to **1 in 6** high school students reported being bullied. In grades 6-12, bullying behaviors can be **direct** (such as *calling someone names, pushing, or leaving someone out*) or **indirect** (like *spreading rumors, leaving others out, or sending hurtful messages online*).

Signs a student may be bullied:

- **Classroom cues:** has declining academic performance or skips school
- **Social cues:** “masks” to fit in; withdraws from friends, avoids social events, or “acts out”
- **Physical clues:** has unexplained injuries or lost/damaged belongings

Why is bullying of students who are neurodivergent different?



For students with neurodivergence, bullying can be a daily challenge that affects their learning, friendships, and safety. Students with disabilities are **3 to 4 times more** likely to be bullied than their peers. When differences in learning, communication, or interactions aren’t understood, students with neurodivergence may face exclusion, teasing, or bullying for seeming “different”, even when no harm is intended. Bullying a student based on a protected characteristic, including a disability, is more serious under the law, and schools must act when bullying affects a student’s safety or ability to learn.

How can I best support students who are neurodivergent who are being bullied?



- **Listen and report:** take concerns seriously, write down what happened, inform school administration and family.
- **Provide support:** give breaks or accommodations when needed.
- **Promote respect:** teach all to respect differences. Everyone’s brain functions differently and bullying is never okay.
- **Intervene and ensure safety:** stop bullying immediately and reassure the student they are not alone.
- **Plan:** create a safety plan with an administrator (check-ins, safe space, trusted adults, buddy system).

What can I do to make my classroom friendly and supportive for everyone?



To build an inclusive and nurturing classroom, you can:

- **Lead by example** and show kindness, collaboration, respect, and fairness, such as by using inclusive language.
- **Teach** students to use communication strategies such as **THINK** (Is it True, Helpful, Important, Necessary, and Kind?).
- **Communicate** rules regarding bullying, what bullying may look like, and how to prevent/intervene when witnessing bullying (refer to Student Tips).
- **Explain** how differences in brain function are normal and remind students it is unacceptable to use hurtful labels against peers.

Students feel safer knowing adults will listen.

Who in my school can offer extra support for students who are being bullied?



Students can get help from:

- School counselors
- School psychologists
- Social workers
- School nurses

These adults can work with **teachers, administrators, and families** to develop a plan to stop bullying and keep students safe and engaged in school.

How can my school be a safe and accepting place for all students?



- **Set clear rules** while avoiding harsh punishments. Reward desired behavior.
- Provide **support** and **counseling** for both students who bully and students who are bullied.
- **Train** all adults on how to prevent and respond to bullying.
- **Post** bullying and neurodiversity resources around school.
- **Implement** supervision of student social activities during lunchtime and breaks.
- **Support** emotion regulation among students.
- **Build** relationships with students and families.

Where can I learn more about neurodiversity and how to prevent bullying?



- **Your school or school website:** Under Senate Bill 939 (2023-2024), district or county offices of education must post resources on bullying and neurodiversity and provide support to students who are bullied for being, or being perceived as, neurodivergent.
- **Scan QR code for more resources:**

