



What does it mean to be neurodivergent?



“**Neurodivergent**” describes someone whose brain works differently. This can include students who qualify for supports under special education law, as well as students who don’t have formal supports but still experience other differences or disabilities that affect their learning, attention, communication, or behavior.

These differences don’t take away from a child’s strengths, potential, or right to feel safe and included at school.

What is bullying, and what are the signs?



Bullying is when someone repeatedly and purposely hurts another person to gain power over them. In 2025, **4 in 10** elementary students reported being bullied.

In elementary school, bullying is often **direct** and **physical**. This may include: *hitting, name-calling, or excluding someone from games.*

Signs a student may be bullied:

- **Classroom cues:** is suddenly uninterested in going to school
- **Social cues:** seems more anxious or quiet than usual; avoiding friends; “acting out” more.
- **Physical clues:** comes home with unexplained injuries or missing belongings.

Why is bullying different for students who are neurodivergent?



Primary school children with special needs or other types of neurodiversity are **2 to 4 times more likely** to be bullied than their peers.

Students who are neurodivergent want to belong like their peers. But differences in communication, sensory needs, or visible supports may be misunderstood. When this happens, students may be teased or excluded for simply being “different.”

Bullying based on a protected characteristic, including a disability, is serious. **Federal laws require schools to act when bullying affects a student’s right to a safe learning environment.**

How can I support students who are neurodivergent facing bullying?



- **Listen and report:** take concerns seriously, document what happened, inform leadership and families.
- **Design for inclusion:** structure lessons and rotate leadership on group activities so every child can participate.
- **Provide support:** watch for bullying especially during unstructured times such as recess/lunch and, if a child is struggling, listen to understand.
- **Plan:** create a safety plan with school administration in consultation with staff and parents/families (safe spaces, buddy system)

Create Safe School Communities for Every Student

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 use inclusive language that celebrates all abilities and communication styles.
- **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 place for all students to belong?



- **Set clear rules** but avoid 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:**

