

MODULE 1

Foundations of Neurodiversity

Discussion Guide

Understanding Neurodiversity · An Educational Initiative of God's Diamonds
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PURPOSE

This guide is designed to help you, the facilitator, lead a meaningful and productive discussion for Module 1: Foundations of Neurodiversity. Your primary goal is not to be an expert, but to create a space of psychological safety where participants can engage with new concepts, question their own assumptions, and begin building a shared language. A successful discussion will see participants leave with a clear, functional definition of neurodiversity, an understanding of the strengths-and-supports model, and a personal connection to the goal of creating belonging. This initial conversation sets the foundation for all subsequent modules.

GROUND RULES

Before beginning, establish ground rules for the conversation. You can present these and ask the group for their consent and additions.

Listen to understand, not to respond. Our goal is shared learning, not debate. Give your full attention to the person speaking.

Speak from your own experience. Use "I" statements to share your perspective (e.g., "I used to think..." or "In my experience..."). Avoid generalizing about the experiences of others.

Honor confidentiality. What is shared in the group stays in the group. This is essential for building the trust required for honest conversation.

Embrace discomfort. Learning requires us to encounter ideas that challenge our existing beliefs. It is okay to feel a bit unsettled; approach these moments with curiosity.

It is okay to pass. You will not be required to answer any question. Participating by listening is valuable.

Assume good intent; attend to impact. We all come to this work from different places. Assume your colleagues are speaking with positive intentions, but also be open to hearing if your words have an unintended negative impact.

OPENING PROMPT

To begin the conversation, invite each person to respond briefly to the following prompt. This is a simple warm-up to get all voices into the room.

"As you went through the module material, what was one word, idea, or story that stood out to you, and why?"

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Use these questions to guide the core of your discussion. You do not need to use all of them. Choose the ones that seem most relevant to your group's context. The notes are for your guidance as a facilitator.

1. The module defines neurodiversity as the normal variation in human brains. What is one belief you held about 'normal' cognition or behavior that this idea challenges?

Facilitator Note: Listen for assumptions about things like attention spans, communication styles, multitasking, or social norms. The goal is to gently guide the group from framing differences as deficits toward seeing them as variations. If someone describes a behavior as 'bad' or 'wrong', you might ask, "In what context might that same trait be a strength?"

2. Let's practice the vocabulary. In your own words, what is the difference between neurodiversity (the group), a neurodivergent person (the individual), and a neurotypical person (the statistical majority)?

Facilitator Note: This is an essential check for understanding. As Nick Walker clarifies in his foundational work, neurodiversity is a biological fact of a population, not a trait of an individual. An analogy might help: 'biodiversity' describes the variety of life in an ecosystem, not a single 'biodiverse animal'. An individual is 'neurodivergent'.

3. Where do we, in this team or organization, currently default to deficit framing? Can you think of a specific example where we describe a challenge by focusing only on what a person lacks?

Facilitator Note: Encourage concrete examples. Shift the conversation from personal criticism ("She's always late with reports") to systemic analysis ("The way we structure deadlines relies on a type of executive function that might not be a strength for everyone. What other ways could we track progress?").

4. The module introduces a strengths-and-supports posture. Thinking about your own life, what is one support that helps you do your best work or be your best self?

Facilitator Note: Consider modeling this by sharing a personal, low-risk example (e.g., "I need a quiet space to do focused writing," or "I use calendar reminders for everything because my prospective memory is a challenge."). This normalizes the idea that everyone, not just neurodivergent individuals, relies on supports to thrive.

5. A key takeaway is that belonging is the goal, and accommodation is the floor. What does the difference between accommodation and belonging look like or feel like in practice?

Facilitator Note: Accommodation is often about compliance and minimizing legal risk (e.g., providing a legally required screen reader). Belonging is about culture and psychological safety, where a person feels valued for their unique contributions and does not have to hide or 'mask' parts of themselves to participate. Ask participants for examples of what makes them feel they truly belong, versus simply being tolerated.

6. The module suggests that you do not need a diagnosis to benefit from neuroinclusive design. What is one environmental shift—in our physical space, our digital tools, or our meeting culture—that we could pilot in the next 30 days that might expand belonging for everyone?

Facilitator Note: Focus the group on small, actionable, and low-cost experiments. Examples include: sending agendas and any pre-reading at least 24 hours before meetings, establishing

'camera-optional' meetings, normalizing the use of noise-canceling headphones in the office, or offering multiple formats for contributing ideas (e.g., in the meeting, in a follow-up document).

7. When speaking about this topic, some people prefer identity-first language ('autistic person'), while others prefer person-first language ('person with autism'). What did you learn about the importance of asking for individual preference?

Facilitator Note: Reinforce that both are valid. The neurodiversity-affirming standard generally defaults to identity-first language, as many neurodivergent people see their neurotype as an inseparable part of their identity, not something they merely 'have'. The most respectful posture is to ask the individual and honor their choice.

DEEPENING PROMPTS

If your group moves quickly or demonstrates a readiness for more advanced concepts, consider using one of the following prompts.

How does the concept of 'masking' or 'camouflaging'—where a person invests significant energy to hide their neurodivergent traits to fit in—show up in our culture? What is the potential cost of this, both for the individual and for the organization?

If we intentionally redesigned our team's primary process (e.g., our project intake, our weekly status meeting) to be ideal for a specific neurodivergent profile, what universal benefits might emerge for everyone else?

CLOSING REFLECTION

To close the session, transition to a period of quiet individual reflection. This allows participants to synthesize the discussion and apply it personally. Read the following prompt aloud and give the group 5 to 10 minutes to write their thoughts privately.

"Take a few minutes for a private written reflection. Don't worry about grammar or polish; this is for you.

Where in your own life have you experienced the difference between being accommodated and truly belonging?

Think about your own cognitive profile. What is a strength you're proud of, and what is a support that helps you use it effectively?

Finally, who in your life might be navigating the world with a brain that works differently from yours, and what is one small thing you can do this week to better support them?"

FURTHER READING

For participants who wish to learn more, you can share these established sources.

Walker, N. (2014). *Neurodiversity: Some Basic Terms & Definitions*. Neurocosmopolitanism.

Austin, R. D., & Pisano, G. P. (2017). Neurodiversity as a Competitive Advantage. *Harvard Business Review*.

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Singer, J. (1999). Why can't you be normal for once in your life? In M. Corker & S. French (Eds.), *Disability discourse*. Open University Press.

Walker, N. (2021). *Neuroqueer heresies: Notes on the neurodiversity paradigm, autistic empowerment, and postnormal possibilities*. Autonomous Press.