

MODULE 1

Foundations of Neurodiversity

Reflection Workbook

Understanding Neurodiversity · An Educational Initiative of God's Diamonds
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HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK

This workbook is a private space for you to process and integrate the concepts from Module 1. The exercises that follow are not tests; they are invitations to reflect on your own experiences, assumptions, and environments through the lens of neurodiversity. The goal is not performance, but honest engagement.

We encourage you to write freely, without concern for grammar or polish. The act of translating thoughts into written words is a powerful tool for clarifying your understanding and connecting abstract ideas to your lived reality. Set aside dedicated time in a quiet space where you can focus without interruption. Your responses are for your own learning and development.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

This module introduced neurodiversity as the natural and valuable variation within human neurology. This concept, supported by decades of research in genetics, developmental psychology, and neuroscience, posits that there is no single "normal" or "right" way for a brain to function. Instead, our species is characterized by a spectrum of cognitive processing styles. Conditions such as autism, ADHD, and dyslexia are not inherent deficits but are elements of this naturally occurring human diversity (Walker, 2014).

Our exploration is anchored in a strengths-and-supports posture. This framework moves beyond a deficit-based model, which focuses exclusively on impairment and disorder. A strengths-and-supports perspective acknowledges that every individual, whether neurodivergent or neurotypical, has a unique profile of cognitive strengths and areas that require support. It recognizes that the environment plays a critical role in determining whether an individual can leverage their strengths and access necessary supports. Challenges are not seen as solely residing within the person, but as a mismatch between the person's needs and their environment.

The ultimate aim of this work is to cultivate belonging. While legal accommodation is a necessary floor for access and equity, belonging is the experience of being seen, valued, and able to participate fully as oneself without the exhausting burden of masking or hiding one's true nature. A community designed for belonging is one that proactively reduces barriers and expands the range of people who can thrive within it.

REFLECTION EXERCISES

Exercise 1: Deconstructing 'Normal'

The concept of a "normal" brain is often a stand-in for the statistically most common neurological profile, which we refer to as neurotypical. However, this statistical average is frequently mistaken for a universal ideal, creating an invisible standard against which all other neurotypes are measured and often found wanting. This exercise invites you to examine your own ingrained beliefs about what constitutes normal thinking, behavior, and communication.

* Describe one belief you held about "normal" brains or behavior that this module has prompted you to reconsider. What was the belief and where do you think it came from?

(Please use the space below to write your reflection.)

* Think of a time you felt pressure to act, think, or communicate in a way that felt unnatural to you in order to fit in. What was the situation and what was the "normal" expectation?

(Please use the space below to write your reflection.)

* How does shifting the goal from "normalcy" to "thriving" change your perception of a specific person or group in your life (including, perhaps, yourself)?

(Please use the space below to write your reflection.)

Exercise 2: The Language of Identity

Language has the power to shape our perceptions and confer dignity. In discussions of neurodiversity, you will encounter both "person-first" language (e.g., "a person with autism") and "identity-first" language (e.g., "an autistic person"). Person-first language was developed to emphasize the humanity of individuals with disabilities, separating the person from the diagnosis. However, many neurodivergent advocates, particularly in the autistic community, prefer identity-first language. They view their neurotype as an inseparable part of their identity, not an accessory. Both forms are valid, and the most respectful approach is always to ask an individual what they prefer.

* Reflect on your default language patterns. Do you tend to use person-first or identity-first language when discussing disability or neurodivergence? Why do you think that is?

(Please use the space below to write your reflection.)

* Consider the phrases "high-functioning" and "low-functioning." Why might these labels be considered unhelpful or harmful, even if used with good intent? What do they obscure about an individual's actual profile of strengths and support needs?

(Please use the space below to write your reflection.)

* What is one concrete change you can make in your own vocabulary to speak more respectfully and precisely about cognitive differences?

(Please use the space below to write your reflection.)

Exercise 3: Mapping Your Own Cognitive Profile

The strengths-and-supports model applies to every human being. All of us have areas where our brains excel and areas where we need tools, strategies, or assistance to function at our best. For example, one person might be an exceptionally creative, non-linear thinker who needs structured reminders to manage deadlines. Another might be a master of detail-oriented, sequential tasks but find large, unstructured social gatherings draining. Recognizing your own profile is a foundational step toward understanding and supporting others.

* Identify two or three of your most significant cognitive strengths. These could be related to creativity, focus, memory, pattern recognition, empathy, or logical analysis. How do these strengths show up in your work, relationships, or personal projects?

(Please use the space below to write your reflection.)

* What are the specific supports that help you function at your best? Think about your environment (e.g., quiet vs. collaborative), tools (e.g., calendars, noise-canceling headphones), and relationships (e.g., a colleague who helps you talk through ideas).

(Please use the space below to write your reflection.)

* Describe a situation where a mismatch between your needs and your environment made it difficult to access your strengths. What was the environmental barrier, and how did it impact you?

(Please use the space below to write your reflection.)

Exercise 4: From Accommodation to Belonging

Accommodation and belonging are related but distinct concepts. Accommodation is often a reactive process, focused on providing the minimum necessary adjustments to enable access, frequently in response to a legal requirement like the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Belonging is a proactive and cultural state. It is the outcome of a community or organization that is intentionally designed to support a wide range of human needs, fostering a sense of psychological safety where individuals can be authentic without fear of penalty. Accommodation keeps you compliant; belonging keeps your people.

* Describe a personal or observed experience that illustrates the difference between a simple accommodation and a genuine sense of belonging. What made the difference?

(Please use the space below to write your reflection.)

* Think about your primary team, family, or community. Where do you see practices that are merely accommodating (i.e., making exceptions for a few)?

(Please use the space below to write your reflection.)

* Where do you see practices that foster true belonging (i.e., designing the environment to work better for everyone)? What does that look and feel like?

(Please use the space below to write your reflection.)

Exercise 5: Identifying Deficit Framing

A deficit frame is a lens that causes us to see people primarily in terms of their problems, weaknesses, and what they cannot do. This is the default perspective of many clinical and educational systems. It shows up in language focused on "symptoms," "disorders," and "impairments" without a corresponding focus on strengths or environmental context. For example, an ADHDer might be described as "inattentive and impulsive" (deficit frame) or as "a

creative problem-solver who thrives in dynamic environments but needs support with sustained focus on administrative tasks" (strengths-and-supports frame).

* Think of a specific team, family, or community setting. Provide one specific example of where you have recently heard or used deficit framing to describe a person or a group's behavior.

(Please use the space below to write your reflection.)

* Take the example from the previous prompt and rephrase it using a strengths-and-supports posture. What new possibilities or solutions emerge when you change the frame?

(Please use the space below to write your reflection.)

* What makes it difficult to shift away from deficit framing? Consider organizational habits, diagnostic systems, or personal fears that might reinforce this old model.

(Please use the space below to write your reflection.)

Exercise 6: The Invitational Conversation

Many of us have people in our lives—family members, colleagues, friends—who may be navigating the world with a neurotype that is different from our own. Often, these differences go undiscussed, leaving individuals to manage their challenges and hide their strengths in isolation. Approaching this topic requires great care, respect for privacy, and a focus on offering support rather than demanding disclosure. This exercise is about creating safety for a conversation, not about forcing one. The goal is to signal that you are a safe person to talk to, if and when they choose.

* Consider someone in your circle whom you suspect might be navigating unspoken challenges related to attention, sensory input, communication, or learning. What behaviors have you observed that, viewed through a neurodiversity lens, might make more sense?

(Please use the space below to write your reflection.)

* What fears or hesitations do you have about opening a conversation? What is the potential relational cost of saying something, and what is the potential cost of continued silence?

(Please use the space below to write your reflection.)

* Draft a single, non-demanding, invitational sentence you could use to open a door for future conversation. For example: "I've been learning about different ways brains can work, and it's making me think about how we can better support each other. If you ever want to talk about it, I'm here to listen."

(Please use the space below to write your reflection.)

INTEGRATION EXERCISE

The principles of neuroinclusion are most powerful when translated into concrete actions. Many of the most impactful changes are not expensive or complex; they are small shifts in the

environment or processes that reduce cognitive burdens and expand psychological safety for everyone. Research on universal design shows that changes made to support neurodivergent individuals—such as providing written agendas before meetings, offering flexible work arrangements, or allowing the use of noise-canceling headphones in an open office—often benefit neurotypical individuals as well. You do not need a diagnosis to benefit from a more thoughtful and flexible environment.

This exercise asks you to design one small, pilotable environmental shift that would expand belonging in a specific context of your life. Choose one domain: your team at work, your family routines, or a community group you are part of.

1. Identify the Context and the Challenge:

Name the specific environment (e.g., "our weekly team meeting," "our family dinner time," "our volunteer committee planning session"). Describe one recurring friction point or challenge in that context that could be related to differing neurological needs (e.g., "people seem disengaged and talk over each other," "it's always chaotic and someone ends up overwhelmed," "we struggle to make clear decisions").

(Please use the space below to write your reflection.)

2. Propose an Environmental Shift:

Based on the learning from this module, propose one specific, concrete, and low-cost change to the environment or process. This is your pilot. Examples include: distributing a clear agenda with discussion questions 24 hours in advance; instituting a "no-interruption" rule where each person gets a set time to speak; creating a designated quiet space in the home or office; making written communication a primary option alongside verbal discussion.

(Please use the space below to write your reflection.)

3. Define the Desired Outcome and a Measure of Success:

What is the goal of your pilot? What would success look like? The outcome should be focused on belonging and participation. For example: "More people will contribute ideas in the meeting," "Family dinner will end with fewer conflicts," "Our committee will leave the meeting with clearer action items." How will you know if the change is working? What will you be looking for?

(Please use the space below to write your reflection.)

LOOKING AHEAD

In this module, you have established a foundational understanding of neurodiversity, learned to distinguish key terms, and practiced applying a strengths-and-supports lens. You have reflected on the power of language, the limits of "normal," and the critical difference between baseline accommodation and genuine belonging. This shared vocabulary and human-centered posture are the essential building blocks for the rest of our journey together.

As we move into subsequent modules, we will delve deeper into specific neurodivergent profiles, exploring the unique strengths and common support needs associated with autism, ADHD,

dyslexia, and more. We will examine practical strategies for inclusive design in communication, management, and collaboration. The framework you have begun to build here—seeing people in their full context, valuing their strengths, and proactively designing supportive environments—will be the tool you use at every step. The work is not to fix individuals, but to build better, more expansive, and more human communities.