



Open Lab
Emerging Minds

Neurodivergence and Mental Health: How Do We Embrace Complexity?

Emerging Minds Open Lab 24th May 2022

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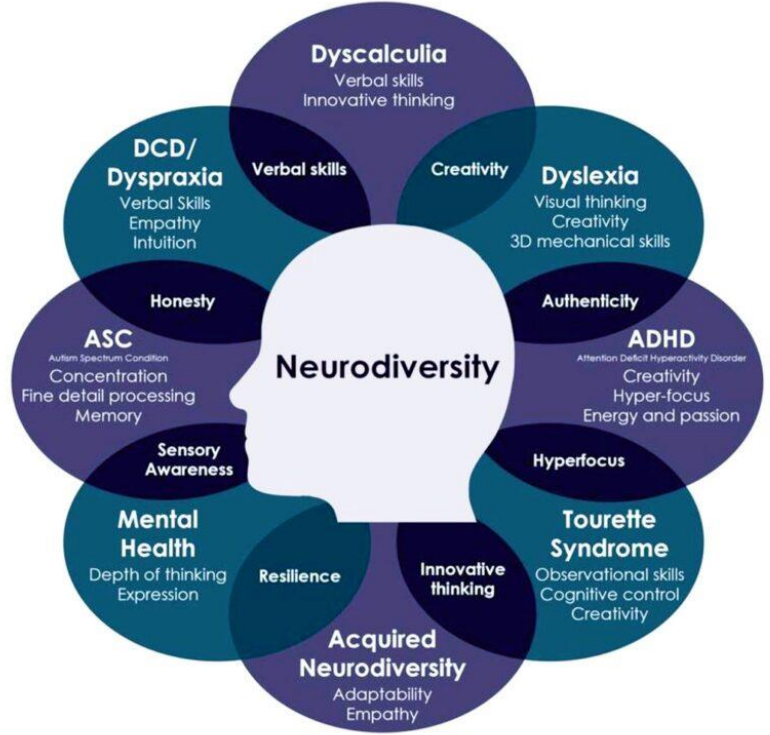
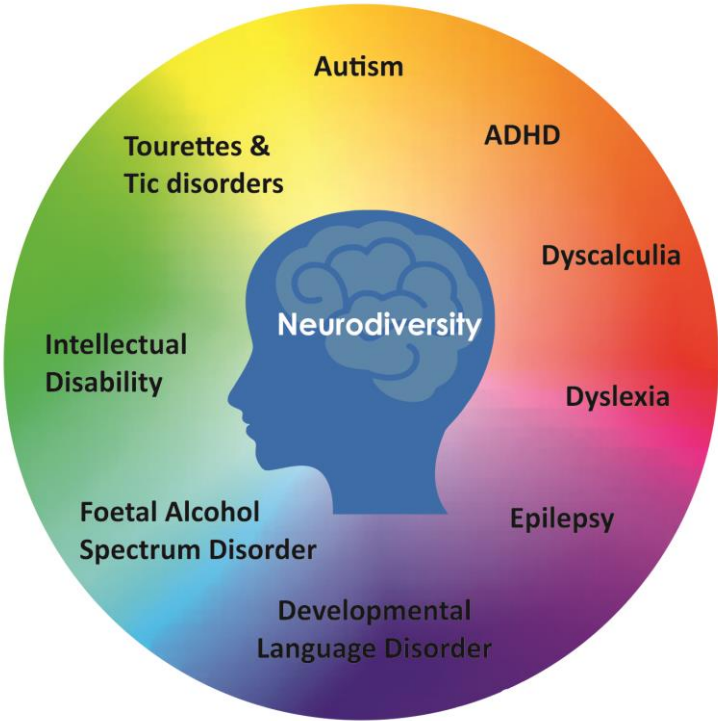
#EmbraceComplexity

@EmbraceComplex

Neurodivergence



<https://blog.mighty-well.com/2020/09/what-is-neurodiversity/>



Created by Dr Nancy Doyle based on the work of Mary Colley

Neurodivergence and mental health

Neurodivergence

Autism
Learning disability
Attention differences (ADHD)
Dyspraxia
Tourette's
Dyslexia
Developmental language disorder

**Neurodivergent
people are more
likely to experience
mental health
conditions**

Mental health

Anxiety
Depression
Obsessive compulsive disorder
Post-traumatic stress disorder
Personality disorders
Sleep disorders
Psychosis

Neurodivergence and mental health

Autism

Anxiety, depression, obsessive compulsive disorders, eating disorders, suicidal thoughts and behaviour, personality disorders, schizophrenia, substance misuse

Learning disability

Anxiety, depression, obsessive compulsive disorders, psychosis, schizophrenia

Neurodivergent people are more likely to experience mental health conditions

ADHD

Anxiety, depression personality disorders, substance misuse

Tourette's

Depression, anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder, sleep disorders

Dyspraxia

Anxiety, depression, psychosis

Why is there overlap between neurodivergence and mental health?

- **Genetics**, *dopamine imbalance*
- **Trauma**, *negative life events, adverse childhood experiences, stigma, discrimination, bullying*
- **Neurodivergent differences**, *sensory and communication differences, cognition, behaviour*
- **Physical health**, *increased likelihood of health conditions*
- **Other factors related to mental health**, *poverty, gender*



Practical challenges

- Barriers of access to support - general and specific to support for neurodivergence and/or mental health conditions
- Pathway of access to support:



Barriers of access to mental health support

Differential presentation

Difficulties recognising/labelling emotions

Masking/camouflaging

Communication differences

Physical health, cognition, behaviour



Recognition

Identification

Support

Fixed views on mental-ill health

Limited expertise, knowledge or skills

Diagnostic overshadowing
(attributing *all* to neurodivergence)

Misdiagnosis

Unclear care pathways

Lack of standardised
mental health
assessments

Siloed services and eligibility criteria
Inaccessible services (location, time, cost)

Non-availability of services/support

Inappropriate support
(not tailored, short-term)

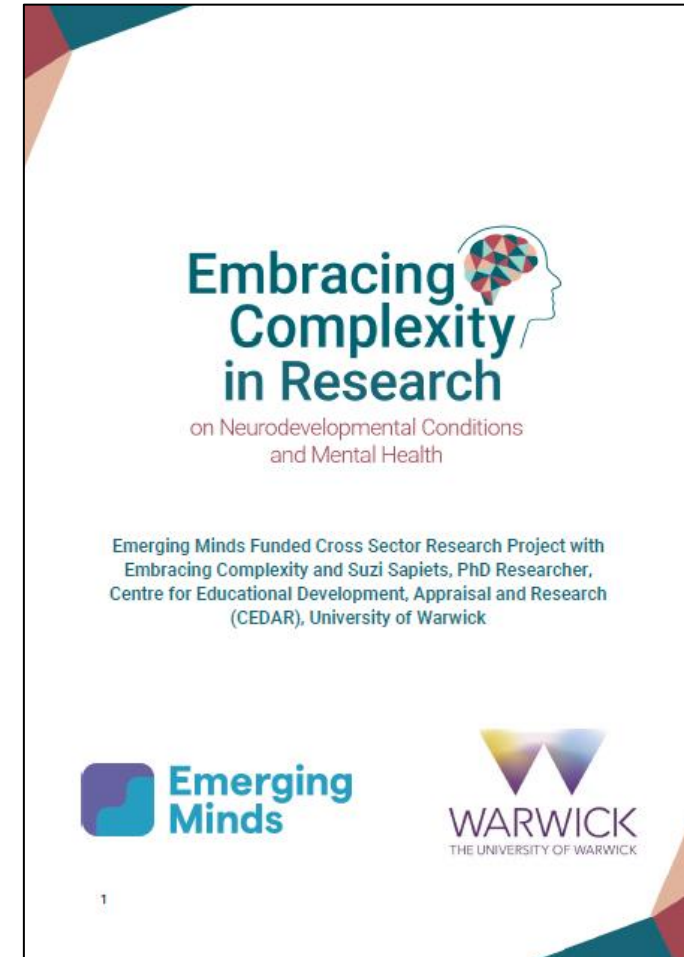
Lack of continuity

Lack of specialist services

Research challenges

embracingcomplexity.org.uk/research

- Mismatch between established research priorities and research being conducted
 - Limited research on supporting neurodivergent people compared to research on causes and genetics
- Lack of awareness and understanding about the overlap of neurodivergence
 - Tendency focus on one area rather than across neurodivergence, related to research and clinical silos
- Difficulties conducting research
 - Inaccessible research studies, participant exclusion, sample size, lack of standardised assessments or core measures, research funding



What can we do differently?

Practice

- Do not make assumptions
- Ask the individual/their family
- Use direct, non-judgemental language
- Take your time – don't rush to diagnose or medicate
- Seek support from other professionals
- Tailor mental health support to the individual's needs
- Actively tackle barriers of access

Research

- Bring together researchers across silos
- Catalogue existing studies
- Identify core measures to enable comparisons
- Fund research based on established priorities
- Improve awareness about the overlap of neurodivergence
- Conduct inclusive and accessible research

Group discussion

- Based on your experience, what are the **key challenges** to supporting neurodivergent children and young people?
- How can we **improve practice and research** on neurodivergence and mental health, to ensure all children and young people are supported?



Thank you!

- Thank you for listening and joining the discussion! 😊
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[@suzijsapiets](https://www.instagram.com/suzijsapiets) [@mindtheflap](https://www.instagram.com/mindtheflap)
- Upcoming webinar Thu 30th June 6-7pm: bit.ly/3Po61EN
- Embracing Complexity: embracingcomplexity.org.uk
- Emerging Minds Open Lab: emergingminds.org.uk/openlab