

# Fact Sheet for Embracing Neurodivergent Occupations and Empowering Disabled Voices: A Knowledge Translation Tool to Support Neurodiversity-Affirming Occupational Therapy Practice and Challenge Ableism Within the Profession

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The **neurodiversity movement** is a social justice initiative led by neurodivergent individuals embracing differences in executive, mental, or neurologic function as valid forms of human diversity (ASAN, n.d.; Dallman et al., 2022). Examples of neurodivergent neurotypes are autism, dyslexia, depression, schizophrenia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and synesthesia (Dallman et al., 2022).

**The problem** → Though occupational therapy practitioners (OTPs) have much to offer in supporting the occupational participation of neurodivergent individuals, the profession is deeply entrenched within the medical model of disability, which may lead to OTPs creating occupational marginalization. Additionally, the profession emphasizes neurotypical outcomes throughout the OT process, which can negatively impact the quality of life of neurodivergent individuals (Dallman et al., 2022; Taylor, 2022).

## Occupational Marginalization

**Occupational Marginalization**, a form of occupational injustice, is the inability of an individual to participate in occupations due to being viewed as different from a larger or dominant population (Durocher et al., 2013).

## Frameworks Guiding the Program

1

Disability Justice

Disability justice acknowledges all bodies and minds are unique and contribute to the diversity of the human experience. This program aims to align with the disability justice movement by standing with disabled individuals, and creating a program that centers disabled voices, promotes critical reflexivity, embraces crip time, and destigmatizes dependency (Berne, 2019; Yao et al., 2022).

2

Community-Defined Evidence Practice + Lived Experience-Informed Practice (CDEP + LEIP)

CDEP+LEIP prioritize practices that are validated by the community the practice is intending to serve, emphasizes the communities are the only experts, and acknowledges that lived experience is the foundation for practice (National et al., 2009; Wise, 2023).

3

International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health - Children and Youth Version (ICF-CY)

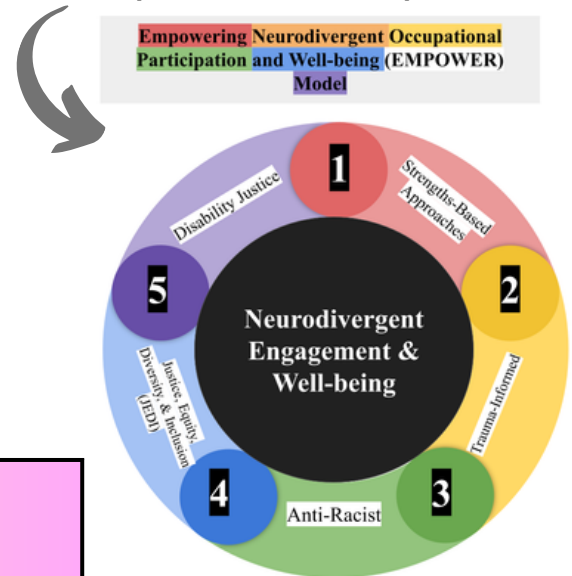
The ICF-CY serves to offer a definition and language of functioning and disability that can be utilized amongst health professionals and policy-makers (Law et al., 2017; WHO, 2007). The ICF-CY is the most research-informed tool for operationalizing the person-environment interaction, and supports translating models of disablement into rehabilitation (Watson et al., 2020)

## Proposed Program → A Neurodiversity-Affirming (NA) Toolkit to Support Neurodivergent Children and Youth

This program serves as an example of community-based participatory research (CBPR), with the inclusion of various of neurodivergent advocates and scholars to maximize neurodivergent lived experience. The program will initially be an in-person workshop for OTPs supporting neurodivergent children and youth, with the goal of creating a website containing the program. The website will be open-access/free to promote accessibility. Once the website is completed, the workshop will be translated to be completed online after modifying the workshop with feedback from OTPs and neurodivergent shareholders. A few components of the program will include:

- A NA occupational therapy model
- Compilation of health and well-being priorities identified by autistic individuals
- Grading of occupational therapy strategies and resources regarding NA characteristics
- NA evaluations including affirming assessment tools
- Resources for NA strategies and their application
- Discussion of models of disablement and the OT process
- Call to action for OTPs, the OT profession, and neurotypical researchers

### Simplified Draft of Proposed Model



**Autistic and neurodivergent ways of participation are valid occupations!**

### Implications for Occupational Therapy Practice

- The review of evidence by disability advocates and scholars heavily advocates for a neurodiversity-affirming knowledge translation program for OTPs (Dallman et al., 2022; Taylor, 2022).
- This program embraces and emphasizes neurodivergent ways of living as valid occupations.
- This program aims to increase pediatric OTPs and their ability to implement meaningful evaluations, affirming strategies, reflect on current practices, challenge ableism within occupational therapy, and amplify neurodivergent voices.
- By providing neurodiversity-affirming care, OTPs can reduce the occupational marginalization experienced by neurodivergent individuals and provide care supported by neurodivergent individuals, including care rooted in disability justice and the neurodiversity-movement.
- Providing neurodiversity-affirming care is a moral imperative for occupational therapy, and OTPs, researchers, and academics must reflect and adapt to answer this call to action (Dallman et al., 2022).

### References



### Introductory Manual for *Embracing Neurodivergent Occupations*

