Neurodiversity and Mental Health

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Before we begin

Timings
The webinar will be approximately 90 minutes. We do not have any scheduled comfort breaks but please feel free to step away from your screen if needed.

Recording
Please note that this webinar will be recorded and published on our website for others to watch on-demand.

Sharing personal experience
Only if you're comfortable doing so, you may be asked to share your own personal experiences during the session to help with education and training.

Safety and openness
Sensitive topics may be discussed during this webinar, please feel free to step away if needed. We want to foster a sense of safety and openness during this webinar where everyone listens to one another and supports each other's perspectives. At the end of the session, we will sign post to organisations to access further support.

About us

Charlie Waller was a strong, funny, popular, good-looking and kind young man, with a close and loving family. To the outside world, he had everything to live for. Yet in 1997, at the age of 28, Charlie died by suicide. He was suffering from depression.

In response to this tragedy, his family founded The Charlie Waller Trust, to open up the conversation around mental health, and to ensure that young people are able to understand and look after their mental health and to spot the signs in others.

Charlie sits at the heart of our story, our vision and our purpose.

Supporting young people's mental health

Our vision

A world in which young people, and families, have the support, the skills and the resilience to be mentally well for life.

Evidence based training

Positive

We take a positive approach to mental health. We focus on prevention and early intervention, and recognise the importance of offering hope.

Proven

Our consultancy, training and resources are all based on sound clinical evidence.

Practical

We give people practical strategies and tools to care for their mental health, and to support others in doing so.

Objectives

- Understand the links between Neurodivergence and mental health and wellbeing
- Understand the different types of neurodiversity
- Learn the kinds of behaviour and communication styles that impact positively on people who are neurodivergent
- Learn how to foster an inclusive culture in which neurodiverse young people feel able to thrive

Understanding Neurodiversity

What is neurodiversity?

- A natural variation in how brains think, learn, and process
- Strengths as well as challenges
- About acceptance and inclusion, not “fixing”

Common types of neurodiversity

- **Autism** – communication & sensory differences, deep focus
- **ADHD** – attention regulation, high energy, creativity
- **Dyslexia** – reading/writing challenges, visual/spatial differences
- **Dyspraxia** – coordination & movement differences
- **Tourette's syndrome** – tics, resilience & unique coping strategies

Other Types of Neurodiversity

- **Dysgraphia** – spelling/handwriting/ organising thoughts on paper
- **Dyscalculia** – difficulties with numbers & maths processing
- **Auditory Processing Disorder** – differences in how sound is processed
- **Umbrella** – many forms beyond the "big four"
- **Mental health conditions** – OCD/PTSD/Bipolar/Schizophrenia & others

Strengths & Challenges

Strengths	Challenges
Creativity & innovation	Focus & attention
Deep focus on interests	Organisation & planning
Honesty & directness	Sensory overload
Visual / spatial thinking	Reading, writing, coordination

Dispelling Myths

- "Everyone's the same" → Each experience is unique
- "Lack of intelligence" → Different forms of intelligence
- "Needs curing/fixing" → Support & acceptance
- "Can't succeed" → Many thrive in life & work

Dispelling Myths

- "Just autism" → Many conditions included
- "Excuse for behaviour" → Real neurological differences
- "Outgrow it with age" → Lifelong differences
- "Can't communicate" → Communication styles vary

Can you think of anymore?

Neurodiversity and mental health: An interconnected reality

Neurodiversity and mental health

- Neurodiversity is not a mental illness
- There is a strong link between neurodiversity and mental health
- Challenges associated with neurodiversity often arise from the world's rigid expectations
- It is not a direct cause and effect but the result of a constant mismatch

Mismatch and stigma

World is not designed for them

- Feeling of being out of sync

Stigma and lack of acceptance

- Feeling misunderstood and judged
- Targets of bullying and discrimination

Internalised struggles

- Feel their natural way of being is wrong or flawed

Leads to self-doubt, shame and feelings of inadequacy

Specific challenges

Social and communication difficulties

- Confusion and exhaustion
- Difficulty forming and maintaining relationships
- Social anxiety
- Isolation and chronic loneliness
- Sense of not belonging

Sensory sensitivities

The world is experienced with heightened or dulled senses

- Painful and overwhelming
- Chronic stress
- Anxiety
- Emotional dysregulation

Academic difficulties

Environments favour specific types of learning

- Struggle to meet expectations
- Feelings of failure
- Low self esteem
- Frustration
- Hopelessness

Impact on mental health

70-90% of individuals with ASC/ADHD have MH condition in their lifetime

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Social Anxiety
- OCD
- Eating Disorders
- Trauma and PTSD
- Low self esteem
- Suicide and self-harm
- Substance misuse

A life span perspective on neurodiversity

- **Childhood:** Undiagnosed struggles, bullying, and feeling 'different.
- **Adolescence:** Increased social pressures, identity crises, and developing coping mechanisms (masking).
- **Adulthood:** Navigating the workplace, managing relationships, and seeking a diagnosis or support
- **Mental Health Impact:** Anxiety, depression, or burnout can manifest at different stages if support is not available.

Positive Communication and Support

Clear and direct communication

- just essential information
- deliver in digestible chunks
- allow time for processing
- minimal extra information

Active listening is really important

- eye contact if appropriate
- nodding or showing attention
- Not doing anything else at the same time
- Asking questions

Supporting positive communication

These were just ideas – everyone communicates differently.

Ask the young people you work with how they prefer to be communicated with.

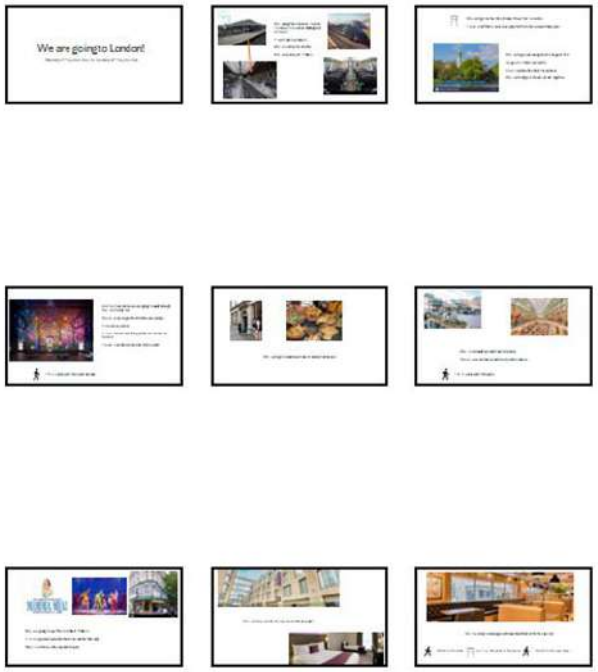
Examples include

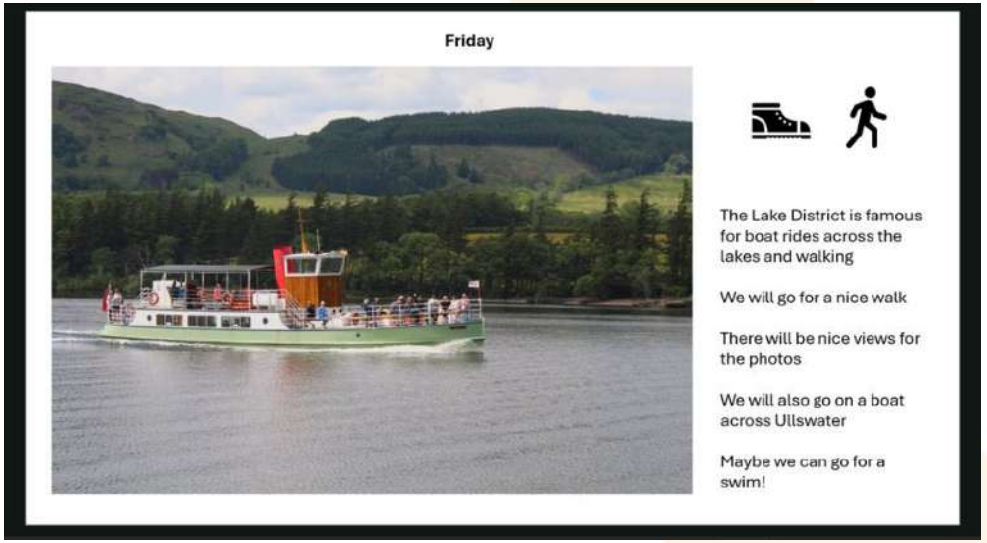
- WhatsApp poll
- Emailed instructions
- Visual images

Try to follow these requests!

Visual communication example

Social stories are useful techniques for communicating large changes in routine or could also be used around major transition changes for any young person.





Self-advocacy

Key principles of self-advocacy

- Know yourself
- Communicate clearly
- Ask for accommodations
- Set boundaries
- Find your allies
- Plan for a conversation
    - Before
    - During
    - After

Fostering an Inclusive Environment

Promoting Inclusivity

Focus on strengths

- Celebrate skills and achievements, just like any child

Create safe spaces

- These benefit everyone
- Consider sensory needs

Continue to educate yourselves!

Case Study
Leo's journey with autism and social anxiety


RESOURCES
DATABASE
INFORMATION
TECHNOLOGY
SEARCH
BUSINESS
BYTE
NETWORK
SOFTWARE
ASSET
MANAGEMENT
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
SERVER
INTERNET
CAPTURE
SUCCESS
MARKETING
CLUSTER VOLUME QUANTITY ANALYTICS
DATABASE SOFTWARE

General Neurodiversity and Mental Health Resources

Mind: Specific information pages dedicated to the link between mental health and conditions like autism and ADHD. Advice on how to get support, including talking therapies, medication, and how to communicate with your GP: https://www.mind.org.uk/

Young Minds: Offer dedicated resources and support for young neurodivergent people and their families. Information on how ADHD and autism can affect mental health and provides tips on how to get help. https://www.youngminds.org.uk/

Anxiety UK: A dedicated page on neurodiversity and anxiety, acknowledging that neurodivergent people are at a higher risk of experiencing anxiety. Information on how anxiety presents differently in neurodivergent individuals and provide guidance for management. https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/

The Brain Charity: Provides free practical help, emotional support, and social activities for people with any neurological condition, including those who are neurodivergent. Offering counselling and mental health support. https://www.thebraincharity.org.uk/

Neurodiversity celebration week: A range of information on ADHD, autism, DLD, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, dyslexia, dyspraxia and Tourette's, for different audiences. https://www.neurodiversityweek.com/

Autism and Mental Health Resources

National Autistic Society: An extensive section on mental health for autistic people. They provide information on seeking help, finding a therapist and a guide for mental health professionals on how to adapt talking therapies for autistic individuals. https://www.autism.org.uk/

Autism Central: Offers support and guidance for autistic adults and their families, with a dedicated section on mental health. They provide information on community mental health services, counselling, and how to find mental health professionals who are experienced in working with autistic people. https://www.autismcentral.org.uk/

Ambitious about autism: Champions the rights of and creates opportunities for autistic children and young people. Services include education through their own schools and colleges, an online Youth Network with wellbeing toolkits, and support for parents, carers and employers. https://www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk/

Autistica: A leading funder of autism research. Their research is directed by their community, prioritizing what matters most to autistic people and their families. Their strategy focuses on improving the understanding of mental and physical health, language, and epilepsy in autism. https://www.autistica.org.uk/

ADHD and Mental Health Resources

ADHD Foundation: Offers support, advice, and information about ADHD. They have a "resource hub" that includes information on the link between ADHD and mental health, including coping strategies and advice. https://www.adhdfoundation.org.uk/

ADHD UK: Provides evidence-based advice and peer support for adults with ADHD. Their website offers resources and information on how ADHD can affect mental health, and they have an online directory of support groups. https://adhduk.co.uk/

Other Resources

Belonging in Schools: Resource from MRC Cognition and Brain Sciences Unit, Cambridge University. Useful for developing inclusive policies. https://inclusion.mrc-cbu.cam.ac.uk/

Neurodiversity passport:
https://www.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/media/109515202/neurodiversity-passport.pdf

Sensory audit:
https://education.gov.scot/media/i3nm5bkt/sensory-audit-tool-for-environments.pdf

Books

General Neurodiversity and Mental Health

- *Unmasking Autism: The Power of Embracing Our Hidden Neurodiversity* by Dr. Devon Price
- *The Power of Neurodiversity: Unleashing the Advantages of Your Differently Wired Brain* by Thomas Armstrong

Autism and Mental Health

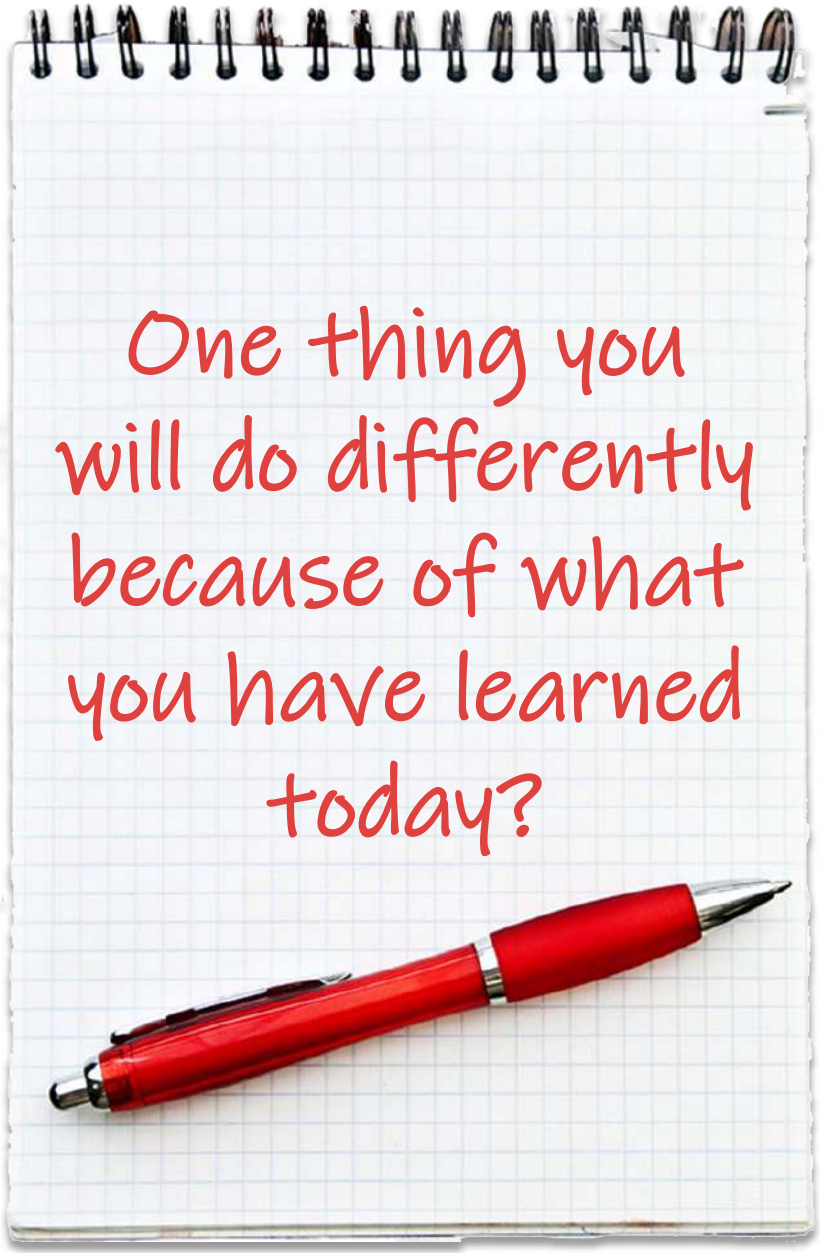
- *The Guide to Good Mental Health on the Autism Spectrum* by Jeanette Purkis, Emma Goodall, and Jane Nugent
- *Odd Girl Out: An Autistic Woman in a Neurotypical World* by Laura James

ADHD and Mental Health

- *Driven to Distraction: Recognising and Coping with Attention Deficit Disorder* by Edward M. Hallowell and John J. Ratey
- *The ADHD Women's Wellbeing Toolkit: Harnessing Your Brain, Utilising Your Potential and Sustaining Your Energy* by Samantha Hiew

Key takeaways

- Neurodiversity is a natural variation in human brains
- There is a strong link between neurodiversity and mental health challenges
- Positive communication and self-advocacy are vital skills
- Inclusivity is an active process
- Continued learning and action are essential


One thing you will do differently because of what you have learned today?

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charliewaller.org/mental-health-training-support/mental-health-webinars

The Charlie Waller Trust

We provide training and mental health resources for:

Schools

Colleges

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Parents and Carers

Workplace

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