

# Creating Neuroaffirming Classrooms and School Practices

Schools may not always recognize how the language used in IEP meetings or team discussions shapes perceptions of a child's needs and abilities. With the right preparation, you can guide these conversations toward positive, strengths-focused outcomes. This guide provides practical tips and examples of neuroaffirming language to help you advocate effectively and support your child's growth and success.

## **Neuroaffirming Practices and Care**

Neuroaffirming practices promote inclusion, reduce stigma, and help children feel valued for who they are. For instance, instead of framing a child as "struggling with behavior," a neuroaffirming perspective might emphasize their need for individualized strategies to support emotional regulation.

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Neuroaffirming:	"Your child benefits from clear instructions and predictable routines to support transitions."
Instead of	"Your child has poor social skills."
Neuroaffirming:	"Your child thrives with structured opportunities to build peer connections."

Neuroaffirming: "Your child engages best in a calm and focused environment with minimal sensory input."

Instead of...

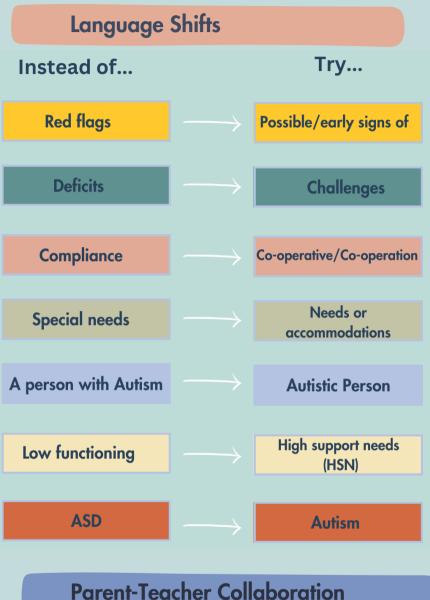
Instand of

"Your child is easily distracted."

"Your child is non-compliant"



# ADVOCATING FOR NEUROAFFIRMING PRACTICES IN SCHOOLS



**Every individual** possesses their own individual unique preferences in regards to language and terminology. It is always good practice to ask the child/family what language they prefer and honour that / ask the school to honour your family's preference.



In a school unfamiliar with strengths-based and neuroaffirming practices, fostering collaboration with teachers and staff is essential. Approach them with a mindset of partnership, acknowledging their efforts while gently introducing your insights as the expert on your child. Share practical, strengths-based strategies that can help your child thrive, even in a less familiar framework. This collaborative effort can help bridge the gap and create a more supportive environment for your child.



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# **Preparing for School Meetings - Toolkit**

#### **Before the Meeting:**

- **Document Strengths and Needs**: List your child's abilities, interests, and areas where support is required. For example, "My child excels at visual learning and benefits from hands-on activities."
- **Define Goals:** Identify what you hope to achieve during the meeting. Examples might include ensuring access to sensory tools, clarifying accommodations, or adjusting language in the IEP to reflect strengths-based approaches.
- *Create a Strengths Profile:* Develop a one-page document highlighting your child's unique qualities, preferred learning styles, and what helps them succeed. Share this with the team to set a positive tone.

#### **During/After the Meeting:**

- Focus on collaboration, using phrases like, "How can we work together to support my child?"
- When concerns are raised, redirect the conversation to strengths. For example, "Yes, transitions are challenging, but they respond well to visual schedules."
- Advocate for language that respects your child's individuality. If someone uses deficit-based language, gently reframe it: "I think what you mean is that \_\_\_\_\_ benefits from extra time to process instructions."

### **Key Terms**

**Strengths-Based:** An approach that focuses on the child's abilities and potential rather than their challenges.

**Neuroaffirming:** Practices that validate and respect neurodivergent experiences without aiming to "normalize" them.

**Accommodations:** Changes in the learning environment or teaching strategies to support access and success.

**Self-Advocacy:** The ability to understand and communicate one's needs and preferences effectively.

