Neurodiversity and Mental Health

What is neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity refers to the differences in the ways that people's brains work and the wide range of ways in which people see and respond to the world. Neurodiversity means there is no single "right" type of brain and that these differences are normal.

People who process information and behave in ways that differ from social norms are described as **neurodivergent**. This gives us a way to talk about diagnoses, such as **autism spectrum disorder** or **attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder**, without framing them as problems or illnesses.

People whose brains function in ways that society expects or considers usual are described as **neurotypical**. When we are talking about children and youth, "neurotypical" is usually defined as reaching **developmental milestones** at a time similar to their peers.

Neurodivergence and mental health

While **neurodivergence** is not considered a medical or mental health diagnosis, children or youth who are neurodivergent may face challenges in some areas of daily life.

For example, they may experience mental health challenges, such as depression and anxiety, at higher rates than their neurotypical peers. This may be a result of genetic factors. But social expectations and lack of supports may also put these children and youth at greater risk of mental health challenges, especially in environments where differences are not understood, respected or accommodated.

Words that are highlighted in bold are defined in the Glossary.

Source: healthymindsbc.gov.bc.ca

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