

Neurodiversity Affirming Workshop for Autistic Children (90 minutes - 2 hours)

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Our Neurodiversity Affirming Workshop aims to build community among autistic children and their families, highlight neurodivergent strengths, and provide space for learning about what it means to be autistic. We ask that each group member bring a personal item that represents their special interest or something that they are passionate about, as a focal point to share with the group.

Group Members: Autistic children ages 7-13

Recommended group size: 4-6

Fidgets and Introductions: 5-10 minutes

To begin our Neurodiversity Affirming Workshop, each group member is encouraged to pick a fidget toy from the variety that are provided. As participants choose a fidget toy that meets their needs, we discuss stimming as a tool for self-soothing.

As a group, we begin introducing ourselves through an icebreaker; sharing something like age or which grade the participant is in. The icebreaker is not intended to put individuals on the spot, rather it is used to highlight commonality amongst the kiddos and increase the likelihood of creating friendships.

Infodumping: ~10 minutes

After the icebreaker, the facilitator shares a story about infodumping and invites the group members to share their experiences with infodumping versus chatting. Specifically, the book *Chatting and Infodumping: A NeuroInclusive Story* from NeuroClastic is a helpful resource during this part of the workshop and provides a foundation for dialogue.

Special Interests: 10-20 minutes. As a follow up to this conversation, we then take turns sharing about our special interests. We sit in a circle and share an item from home that represents our passion and interest. Each member is invited to share as little or as much as they are comfortable.

Collages: ~30 minutes

After discussing special interests, we transition to an open-ended activity in which group members are invited to design a collage that represents their interests and values. We discuss the concept of neurodiversity and how it is valuable that we are all different and have different ways of thinking. Craft supplies are provided and group facilitators provide examples for how the collage could be created to represent their unique qualities. As members finish their collage, they are invited to share about their design and what it means to them. Group members might notice shared interests or inquire about each others hobbies. We highlight how the differences in the collages show our neurodiversity.



Treats: 10-15 minutes

Since this group is designed to celebrate neurodiversity, we then take time to enjoy a treat and encourage unstructured conversation. In a previous workshop, we decorated cupcakes with frosting, sprinkles, and candy. Each member usually has a different style of cupcake and we highlight the value in the different ways that people decide to decorate. Participants are also invited to make a treat for their parent or guardian to bring home

Circle Stories: 10-15 minutes

Finally, as we are wrapping up, we engage participants in a group story. It begins by having a facilitator create an introductory sentence, like “It was a beautiful day and John wanted to go to the park.” Then, moving clockwise, the next person in the circle is invited to add another sentence to the story. Each person adds their own twist and perspective to the story and the game continues until the story finds a conclusion. This game can be repeated as many times as members of the group are interested. This activity tends to elicit humor and creativity.

After the workshop is over, facilitators take the kiddos back to the lobby where they join their caregiver. Families can be encouraged to exchange information for future playdates.

