

# Guiding Principles for Implementing Neurodiversity-Affirming Care at BSLG

## Relationship-Focused

We affirm that at the heart of speech-language pathology intervention is a therapeutic relationship, which must be a space for 1) cultivating trust and safety; 2) expressing curiosity in the individual; and 3) sharing power.

With this in mind, we commit to training our staff in trauma-informed care.

## Respect for All

We recognize and celebrate neurocognitive differences.

We will make space for neurodivergent individuals to express needs, make their own decisions, and advocate for themselves.

## Client-Led, Strengths-Based Intervention

We recognize that neurodivergent individuals have unique abilities, insights, and experiences and these should inform the assessment and intervention process.

We will prioritize a collaborative approach to intervention that emphasizes client strengths.



## Authenticity & Autonomy

We appreciate that human beings communicate in diverse ways – all of which will be valued.

We affirm that authenticity in communication is the foundation for a meaningful intervention experience.

## Flexibility

We acknowledge that flexible systems and ways of being are more equitable for all, including neurodivergent individuals.

We will strive for *flexibility* in our policies and practice.

## Neurodiversity as a Journey

We believe that being a “neurodiversity-affirming” clinic is a journey and not a destination.

We commit to ongoing self-reflexivity and continuous learning that references neurodivergent voices and lived experiences.

# What Neurodiversity Means to Us Now

We recognize “neurodiversity” as a biological fact, referring to the “virtually infinite neuro-cognitive variability within Earth’s human population” (Judy Singer). What this diversity actually means is that each of us is unique in terms of our abilities, needs, and the way we process information.

We further acknowledge that *neurodiversity* is a paradigm that reinforces that there are many ways of thinking, being, etc., and a social movement - part of the *Disability Rights Movement* - aimed at achieving equity, inclusion, and civil rights for all neurodivergent people.

Finally, we recognize the importance of *intersectionality* within this context, acknowledging that there is no single neurodivergent experience, but rather that experiences are absolutely individual, and influenced by factors like gender, race, sexuality, age, and socioeconomic status.

*Neurodiversity* includes all neurocognitive differences, such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, Tourette's, and other cognitive variations. In the context of speech & language this also extends to dysgraphia, learning disorder, language disorder, stuttering, apraxia... and more!



## Allyship

While best practices will continue to evolve, at this moment, we understand our responsibilities in allyship to include (but not be limited to)...

- ✓ Recognizing that people choose to identify themselves in different ways
- ✓ Recognizing that language matters and evolves
- ✓ Embracing shared responsibility for repairing communication breakdowns
- ✓ Fostering inclusive and welcoming environments
- ✓ Challenging discriminatory behaviour when encountered
- ✓ Advocating for neuroinclusive policies and practice

# Guiding Principles for Neurodiversity-Affirming Care at BSLG

**1. Respect for All:** We recognize and celebrate neurocognitive differences. Recognizing that neurodivergent individuals are innately capable, rather than seeking to 'empower', clinicians will make space for neurodivergent individuals to express their needs, make their own decisions, and advocate for themselves.

**2. Relationship-Focused:** At the heart of speech-language pathology intervention is a therapeutic relationship. We affirm that this relationship must be a space for 1) cultivating trust and safety; 2) expressing curiosity in the individual; and 3) sharing power.

Establishing trust and safety with neurodivergent clients (and all people) requires that clinicians act in ways that are dependable, reliable, clear, and transparent. (Prizant, 2015) Trauma-informed care (TIC) principles, which also center safe and trusting relationships, are critical to neurodiversity-affirming care. We commit to training our staff in TIC.

**3. Client-Led, Strengths-Based Intervention:** We acknowledge that speech-language practice has traditionally referenced a medical model of care that highlights deficits rather than strengths. Neurodivergent individuals have unique abilities, insights, and experiences – all of which should inform the assessment and intervention process.

As clinicians working in partnership with neurodivergent clients, we recognize that our clients are experts on their own bodies, wellness, and care, and will prioritize a collaborative approach to intervention that emphasizes client strengths. Working from this understanding, strengths-based speech-language goal selection will be carried out together with clients and their families/circles of care.

**4. Authenticity & Autonomy:** We appreciate that human beings communicate in diverse ways, using oral language, gestures, facial expressions, body language, written language, and assistive technology, etc. All efforts to communicate using these diverse modalities will be valued, as authenticity in communication is understood to be the foundation for a meaningful intervention experience.

Clinicians will approach authenticity as the starting point for supporting self-advocacy/ personal agency, bodily autonomy, and communication autonomy: "being able to say what I want to say, to whoever I want to say it to, whenever I want to say it, however I want to say it" (Gayle Porter).

**5. Flexibility:** We acknowledge that inflexible systems and ways of being are more equitable for all, including neurodivergent individuals. We commit to being inclusive of many ways of being, knowing, and processing information. We commit to striving for *flexibility* in our policies and practices.

**6. Neurodiversity as a Journey:** We believe that being a "neurodiversity-affirming" clinic is a journey and not a destination. Affirmation is rooted in awareness. Ongoing self-reflexivity, including cultivating awareness of our own biases and perspectives, policies and practices, is essential to meaningful change in the way speech-language practice approaches neurodiversity. To this end, we commit to continuous learning that references neurodivergent voices and lived experiences.