



MUSIC WORKS NORTHWEST HOLDS A NEURODIVERSITY-AFFIRMATIVE APPROACH TO MUSIC THERAPY

What is Neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity can mean different things to different people. At Music Works Northwest, when we talk about Neurodivergence, we are talking about someone who thinks, learns, processes information or sees the world differently from what society views as typical. This may include Autism, ADHD, learning disabilities, sensory processing differences, Down Syndrome, PTSD, or anxiety, to name just a few.

What does it mean to have a Neurodiversity-Affirmative Approach?

We hold a Neurodiversity-Affirmative approach to music therapy. For us this means that:

1. We view Neurodiversity simply as a part of human diversity, not as a problem to be fixed.
2. As we continue our self-education as music therapists, we prioritize learning from Neurodivergent communities and Neurodivergent self-advocates, which informs our language, our goals and priorities in therapy, and everything about our practice. We prioritize and center Neurodivergent voices above Neurotypical voices as we work with this community.
3. We recognize that we will make mistakes as we do this work, and will strive to acknowledge them and fix them as we continue to learn.
4. We will not encourage individuals to try to fit into neurotypical norms (see more information about goals and objectives in therapy on reverse side).
5. We default to identity-first language (i.e. Autistic individual instead of individual with Autism) unless person-first language is preferred/requested by the individual or community that we're referring to.



What does a Neurodiversity-Affirmative Approach mean for the goals and objectives that we work toward in therapy?

We can address a wide range of goals in music therapy, guided by the client's and family's priorities (some examples in the left-hand column below). However, goals that come from a neuronormative lens and set of priorities are not a part of our work with clients (some examples in the right-hand column below).

Examples of Goals That We Address in Music Therapy

- Building healthy relationships
- Self-advocacy
- Self-expression
- Learning, understanding and communicating one's own sensory, learning and access needs
- Emotional regulation and coping skills
- Academic skills
- Fine and gross motor skills
- Understanding neurotypical behavior and communication - not for the sake of imitating or emulating, but as a way to understand others who might think and act differently
- Music-related leisure skills
- And many others

Examples of Goal Areas That We Will Not Address in Music Therapy

- Eye contact
- Spoken communication to the exclusion of other forms of communication
- Reduction of (safe and healthy) stimming behaviors
- "Active Listening" or "Whole Body Listening"
- Learning how to mask or act more neurotypical
- Neuronormative conversation and turn-taking

ANTI-ABLEISM AND NEURODIVERSITY-AFFIRMATIVE RESOURCES

- Autism Inclusivity Facebook Group
- Reframing Autism | <https://www.facebook.com/reframingautism>
- Neurodivergent Rebel | <https://www.facebook.com/NeurodivergentRebel>
- The Arc of King County | <https://arcofkingcounty.org/>
- Not An Autism Mom | <https://www.facebook.com/notanautismmom>
- Kristy Forbes | <https://www.facebook.com/inTunePathways>
- Project LETS | <https://www.facebook.com/projectlets>
- Autism in Black | <https://www.facebook.com/autisminblk>

Questions?

We understand that our approach is not universally accepted, and we warmly welcome your questions, concerns, observations and experiences. Please feel free to reach out to kschneider@musicworksnnw.org.