

FREE RESOURCE FOR PARENTS

Parent Toolkit: Supporting Your Neurodivergent Child

Practical guidance for understanding your child's diagnosis, navigating school systems, and building support at home.

You are not starting from zero. You already know your child better than any professional ever will. This toolkit helps you organize what you know, ask better questions, and advocate more effectively. It covers three areas: understanding the diagnosis, working with schools, and supporting your child at home.

Part 1: Understanding the Diagnosis

FIRST STEP

Get the full evaluation report

Ask for the complete written report from any psychologist or specialist. It contains specific scores and observations that are essential when requesting school accommodations.

FIRST STEP

Learn the difference between a diagnosis and a prognosis

A diagnosis describes how your child's brain works right now. It does not predict a ceiling. Many neurodivergent individuals thrive with the right environment and support.

KNOW THIS

Co-occurring conditions are common

ADHD and anxiety frequently appear together. Autism and sensory processing differences often overlap. One diagnosis rarely tells the whole story. Ask whether additional evaluations are warranted.

KNOW THIS

Masking can hide symptoms

Many neurodivergent children, particularly girls, learn to suppress their traits early. A child who seems fine at school may be exhausted by the effort. Home behavior is diagnostic information too.

Part 2: Navigating School Systems

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Request accommodations in writing

Verbal agreements with teachers do not follow your child from year to year. Always put accommodation requests in writing and keep copies. Email creates a paper trail.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Ask specifically about an IEP or 504 plan

These are formal documents that legally require schools to provide agreed-upon supports. An IEP includes specialized instruction; a 504 covers accommodations within a standard classroom.

PREPARATION

Bring documentation to every meeting

Your child's evaluation report, any relevant medical letters, and notes from previous meetings. Schools respond better when requests are grounded in documented evidence.

PREPARATION

Prepare a one-page "about my child" document

A short profile describing how your child learns best, what triggers stress, what helps them regulate, and what they are good at. Give it to every new teacher at the start of the year.

ADVOCACY

You can bring a support person to school meetings

A friend, advocate, or specialist can attend IEP and 504 meetings with you. You do not have to walk in alone. Having someone take notes while you talk is genuinely useful.

ADVOCACY

Request progress reports, not just grade reports

A grade shows an outcome. A progress report shows whether supports are actually working. Ask how the school is measuring your child's development against their specific goals.

Questions to ask at school meetings

- What specific accommodations is my child currently receiving, and how are they being implemented daily?
- How will we measure whether these supports are working?
- Who is responsible for ensuring accommodations happen in every class?
- What happens to this plan when my child moves to a new teacher or school?
- Has my child's sensory environment been assessed?
- Is there a quiet space available if my child becomes overwhelmed?
- How can I reinforce at home what is being worked on at school?

Part 3: Supporting Your Child at Home

ENVIRONMENT

Create a predictable daily structure

Neurodivergent children regulate better when they know what comes next. Visual schedules, consistent routines, and advance warning before transitions reduce anxiety significantly.

ENVIRONMENT

Designate a low-stimulation space

A corner, a tent, a quiet room. Not a punishment space. A place your child can go to decompress before they reach a breaking point. Teach them to use it proactively, not only in crisis.

COMMUNICATION

Ask about their day differently

"How was school?" rarely works. Try "What was the hardest part today?" or "Was there anything that felt good?" Specific questions yield specific answers.

COMMUNICATION

Separate behavior from character

Address what happened, not who your child is. "That choice made things harder for your sister" lands very differently than "You are so selfish." Neurodivergent children often already carry significant shame.

AFTER SCHOOL

Expect decompression time before homework

Many neurodivergent children hold it together all day at school and need significant downtime before they can engage again. Fighting this window makes evenings harder for everyone.

TEENS

Involve them in their own advocacy

Teenagers with neurodivergent profiles benefit from understanding their own diagnosis and learning to articulate their needs. Self-advocacy is a skill that protects them into adulthood.

Language that helps vs. language that hurts

Avoid

- "You're so smart, you just need to try harder."
- "Why can't you be more like your brother/sister?"
- "You were fine yesterday. What's wrong today?"
- "Stop being so dramatic."
- "You're not even trying."

Try instead

- "Your brain works differently. Let's figure out what works for you."
- "Every person has their own strengths."
- "Some days are harder than others. That's okay."
- "It sounds like that was really overwhelming."
- "What would help you right now?"

A NOTE FOR PARENTS

Taking care of a neurodivergent child is demanding. If you are exhausted, overwhelmed, or grieving the expectations you had for your child's experience, that is a normal response to a genuinely hard situation. Seeking support for yourself is not a distraction from supporting your child. It is part of it.

Quick reference checklist

- I have a copy of my child's full evaluation report.
- I know whether my child has an IEP, a 504 plan, or neither, and what the difference means.
- I have submitted accommodation requests in writing.
- I have (or am working on) a one-page "about my child" document for teachers.
- My child has a designated low-stimulation space at home.
- Our daily routine includes predictable transitions and advance warnings.
- My child knows (at an age-appropriate level) what their diagnosis means.
- I have at least one professional or community resource I can reach out to for support.
