

Neurodiversity and Spina Bifida

June 2024

What Is Neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity is a word used to describe how people's brains can work in different ways. People who say they are "neurodivergent" may think, learn, or behave in ways that are different from others. It's not a medical diagnosis, but some people like to use this word to talk about how their brain works.

People with Spina Bifida, learning disabilities, ADHD (Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder), or autism may sometimes call themselves neurodivergent. It's a way of showing that their brains are unique.

Terms Related to How the Brain Works in People with Spina Bifida

ADHD (Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder)

ADHD is a condition where people may:

- Have trouble paying attention
- Get distracted easily
- Be very active or act without thinking

Doctors and psychologists use a special guide to help diagnose ADHD. This guide is called the DSM-5. A trained professional, like a psychologist or psychiatrist, can test for ADHD.

To learn more about ADHD, visit:

- [CDC - ADHD Diagnosis](#)
- [American Psychiatric Association - ADHD](#)
- [CHADD - ADHD Information](#)

Some students with ADHD may get extra help at school. ADHD is not listed on its own in special education laws, but students can still get help under a category called "Other Health Impaired."

Executive Dysfunction

Executive dysfunction means having trouble with certain brain skills that help us manage daily tasks. People with this challenge may find it hard to:

- Pay attention
- Remember things
- Stay organized



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- Manage time
- Start and finish tasks
- Think through problems

It's more than just being forgetful once in a while. It can make school, chores, or work really hard every day. For example, a person might have trouble following the steps to make a meal or finish a school project—even if they are smart and trying hard.

Many kids and adults with **ADHD** or **Spina Bifida** also have trouble with executive functioning. This is because their brains work a little differently.

Even though executive dysfunction isn't a medical diagnosis, doctors and teachers understand that it's a real challenge. It can happen along with other conditions like ADHD, mood disorders (like depression), and learning differences.

To learn more:

- [ADDitude Magazine](#)
- [Medical News Today](#)
- [Spina Bifida Association](#)

Specific Learning Disability (SLD)

A **specific learning disability** is when a person has trouble learning in certain areas, even though they are smart and try hard. This can include problems with:

- Listening
- Speaking
- Thinking
- Reading
- Writing
- Spelling
- Doing math

SLD does **not** mean someone has a problem because of vision, hearing, or emotional struggles, or because they didn't have access to school. It is a **real learning difference** in how the brain understands and uses information.

SLD is usually found through special testing that checks how a person thinks and learns. It often shows up when someone has a big gap between how smart they are and how well they are doing in school.



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To learn more:

- [Learning Disabilities Association of America](#)
- [LDA - For Adults](#)

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a brain-based condition that affects how a person:

- Talks and communicates with others
- Gets along with people
- Learns and behaves

People with autism might have very strong interests, follow routines over and over, and find some social situations difficult. That's why it's called a "spectrum"—some people have mild challenges, and others need more help.

Autism is usually diagnosed when a child is young, but sometimes it's found later. A psychologist or doctor does special testing to help figure it out.

To learn more:

- National Institute of Mental Health
- [Autism Speaks](#)
- [CDC - Autism Info](#)

Why This Matters for People with Spina Bifida

Some kids and adults with **Spina Bifida** may also have learning differences like SLD, ADHD, or autism. Not everyone will, but it's important to understand how these conditions affect learning and life.

If you or your child has Spina Bifida and you want to know more, talk to a doctor, psychologist, or school team for help.

By Julie Yindra, MEd and Andrew Zabel, PhD, with input from Karlin Bruegel, PhD.

This information does not constitute medical advice for any individual. As specific cases may vary from the general information presented here, SBA advises readers to consult a qualified medical or other professional on an individual basis.