

15 NEURODIVERSITY-INCLUSIVE SEL STRATEGIES

Neurodivergent minds tend to think, learn, and process information differently than neurotypical ones. Teaching neurodiversity-inclusive SEL means using strategies and practices that both address common challenges posed by neurodiversity and build on opportunities and strengths.



SECURE & CALM SELF-MANAGEMENT	SOUND OFF Give children age-appropriate tools to create their own quiet, such as foam earplugs or noise cancelling headphones.	TAKE TIME Give children ample time to complete tasks, especially complex ones. Use a timer to help them manage their time.	PRAISE WISELY Praise positive behaviors often and specifically, ideally within 5 seconds of observing them, to reinforce them.
COMPASSIONATE & KIND SOCIAL AWARENESS	EYE SPY In groups or pairs, assign a "looker" to pick an item to gaze at. Others follow their gaze and try to guess what the item is.	BE A MIRROR In pairs, invite a leader to make facial expressions and a follower to imitate them. Then switch.	DEFINE KIND Link empathy to specific behaviors, such as not smiling when someone is hurt and verbal statements like "how can I help?".
GETS ALONG WITH OTHERS RELATIONSHIP SKILLS	READ SOCIALY Read books or watch shows about friends together and discuss why the characters act the way they do. Compare to real life.	MAKE A PLAY DATE Engage in non-competitive, child-directed play without distractions regularly. Comment on what you notice and feel.	USE 'I' MESSAGES Practice using "I" messages to express feelings and desires in social situations, such as "I feel sad when you say I can't play."
SOLVES PROBLEMS PEACEFULLY RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING	COMIC RELIEF Turn a problem into a comic strip and invite children to draw out possible solutions. Invite children to share if comfortable.	USE DISTRACTION Identify triggers in advance. Act early to support an upset child before they escalate. Distraction can help shift intense feelings.	WORK TOGETHER Define the problem, make a pros and cons list, and brainstorm solutions together. Make a specific plan and evaluate progress.
ALERT & ENGAGED SELF-AWARENESS	BREAK IT DOWN Break down behaviors into manageable steps. Chart progress together. Reward completion with small, frequent incentives.	AIM FOR 4:1 Try to make 4 positive comments for every 1 negative one. Use consequences sparingly, and follow through right away.	DIRECT MINDFULLY Give directions that are clear, specific, and essential. Use statements, not questions. Try to cut directions by 50%!