



# Neurodiverse Learner Characteristics

Notice	Recognise		Respond
You might notice differences in these areas...	Strengths	Sticking Points	Depending on the strength or sticking point you observe, you might try one or more of these strategies
	You might see one or more of these characteristics		
<b>Thinking</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deep, connected thinking</li> <li>• Big picture thinking</li> <li>• Sees all the different possibilities</li> <li>• Strong memory, logic and reasoning</li> <li>• Strong visual thinker</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seems stuck in one way of thinking and not able to choose a different approach when this is needed</li> <li>• Applies creative thinking when logical reasoning is needed or vice versa</li> <li>• Doesn't seem able to remember or notice details OR is overly focused on details</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give students the overarching ideas first then tie details to these</li> <li>• Recognise and celebrate the different ways of thinking that all contribute to learning</li> <li>• Harness creative thinking by teaching and using creative thinking strategies across all learning</li> <li>• Allow opportunities for deep and complex thinking for students who relish it</li> </ul>
<b>Learning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Great ideas in conversation</li> <li>• Shows high abilities in some areas</li> <li>• Has specialised areas of knowledge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoids written work or written work doesn't reflect thinking or discussion</li> <li>• Has uneven achievement across subjects and skills</li> <li>• Isn't particularly interested in school subjects</li> <li>• Easily bored and rushes through work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use many different ways for students to show what is known, including using technology</li> <li>• Understand, celebrate and leverage all strengths</li> <li>• Support transfer from interests into school subjects</li> </ul>
<b>Doing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Great focus and engagement when constructing, deconstructing and tinkering</li> <li>• Can express themselves and their ideas creatively in art/ music/ and/ or drama</li> <li>• Able to produce or engage in detailed, fine work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physically clumsy or awkward</li> <li>• Difficulties working with shapes, maps, games requiring visual and spatial skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give options of hands-on, artistic, construction, or tech-enabled activities across all learning experiences</li> <li>• Build understanding of body in space through movement activities</li> </ul>
<b>Beliefs about Learning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be intensely involved with learning in the moment</li> <li>• Keen to achieve well</li> <li>• Enjoys learning for its own sake</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perfectionism and frustration showing up as withdrawal or challenging behaviour</li> <li>• Fixed and limiting ideas about abilities or limits</li> <li>• Refuses or avoids some tasks, may seem lazy or non-compliant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teach students to understand themselves as learners</li> <li>• Ask students about their own sticking points as learners and develop strategies to work around these together</li> <li>• Use successful experiences to promote and teach a growth mindset</li> </ul>
<b>Organising for Learning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understands or quickly works out what is expected in learning or social activities</li> <li>• Can set and work towards their own goals</li> <li>• Seems well organised and able to stay on-track</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doesn't keep track of time,</li> <li>• Finds it hard to get started and to keep going with activities</li> <li>• Struggles to keep track of their things</li> <li>• Finds it hard to understand the expectations of activities or social situations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use and teach simple organisation systems and strategies</li> <li>• Give chunked time expectations for tasks</li> <li>• Make the expectations clear and explicit</li> </ul>
<b>Focusing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intense focus when interested, and passionate interests</li> <li>• Interested in absolutely everything</li> <li>• High energy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It can be hard to 'change gears', or very scattered focus</li> <li>• Interests can be restrictive or limiting</li> <li>• Moving, doing or talking all the time</li> <li>• Could be seen as lazy and uninterested</li> <li>• May struggle to sit long enough to eat</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use visual timers and visual timetables for easier time management and transitions</li> <li>• Celebrate all interest areas and gently introduce related interest areas</li> <li>• Build movement into normal classroom life</li> </ul>
<b>Expressing Emotions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotional sensitivity</li> <li>• Highly empathetic</li> <li>• Strong sense of fairness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited regulation of emotions</li> <li>• Deep feelings that override everything else that's going on</li> <li>• Sense of difference</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make space for all emotions</li> <li>• Actively teach emotional regulation skills for all learners</li> </ul>
<b>Interacting with Peers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong social awareness and empathy</li> <li>• Prefers the company of just one trusted friend or adult</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seems isolated: often alone, few friends, tags along</li> <li>• Dominates others or overwhelms them</li> <li>• Different ways of getting along with others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talk with students to find out about their social preferences and goals and help them to achieve these through active skills teaching</li> <li>• Engineer and support opportunities to connect with like minds</li> </ul>
<b>Interacting with Teachers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enthusiastic, hard-working and conscientious, when the conditions are just right</li> <li>• Gets on with things in a settled way</li> <li>• Asks a lot of questions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doesn't seem to listen to or follow instructions</li> <li>• Dominates teacher time through excitement, confusion or frustration</li> <li>• Seems confused or distant, not engaged in activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check in with students individually and regularly</li> <li>• Give instructions in multiple ways and in different sized chunks</li> <li>• Give multiple ways to work with the teacher, for example through a quiet conversation, a notebook or shared doc</li> </ul>
<b>Interacting in their Environment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sees, hears and feels everything that's going on</li> <li>• Processes information very quickly</li> <li>• Takes time to think deeply about ideas</li> <li>• Involved in everything going on</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Big or unexpected responses to sensory input</li> <li>• Uneven pace of thinking and learning</li> <li>• Loses track of time and things really easily</li> <li>• Struggles with unexpected change - needs time to transition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take a sensory stocktake and calm the sensory environment, creating a separate calm space that is available for all</li> <li>• Provide simple sensory tools for all students</li> <li>• Have more flexible pacing for all learners</li> <li>• Communicate changes in advance</li> </ul>