



## **Adjustments: Get to know each person for who they are**

**By Pam Morris, Early Learning Center director**

Not so long ago, I shared a quote by Fred Rogers: *"We all have different gifts, so we all have different ways of saying to the world who we are."* Then and now, I truly believe that this is a beautiful thought when it comes to seeing yourself, and others, as individuals. We all need adjustments to make our daily lives better, more appropriate for our success. This includes adults and children. Fred Rogers lived his life as an educator. That wasn't his formal profession before or while he had his much beloved show on PBS, but as we use his ideas now, they all make sense to teachers around the world.

And I believe that he was ahead of his time when it came to his insight, especially in reference to neurodiversity. According to *The Very Well Mind*, "Neurodiversity describes differences in brain function from person to person that affect daily mental functions." This concept has been used most often within the world of autism but at its very core, only seeks to illustrate that we all think differently and different adjustments need to be made for our success.

### Neurodiversity and What it Means to Us

At the heart of the definition, it means that our brains work differently. Sometimes those differences can be attributed to a specific diagnosis, such as autism or dyslexia. In these cases and others like them, there may be a list of accommodations that can be or need to be made in order for that individual to successfully function. But is every person who has been diagnosed with these the same or need the same accommodations? The simple answer is no. Just as we are all individuals, those with a diagnosis are also individuals.

### Differences Outside of the Diagnoses

And then there are those people who haven't been diagnosed yet or don't meet the criteria. As we learn more about the brain and the way it functions, the more we learn that more and more individuals are "neurodivergent." Their brains work differently and therefore, adjustments still need to be made but might not come from a "list."



### What Do We Do Now?

Never assume. Don't put people into neat little boxes and expect them to conform to your definition of who they are. One child with autism may exhibit some of the characteristics of the textbook definition but not others. That child may respond differently to the suggested modifications and need something different.

### So Again, What Do We Do Now?

Get to know each person for who they are. Learn the strengths and weaknesses and adjust accordingly. This goes for the children in your classrooms, the parents with whom you interact, your colleagues at work, the people in your family. It might mean taking into account a differing belief system or how someone learns. And it isn't that you need to change the way you do something. It just means that you might need to modify your expectations. Eliana can create a detailed drawing that depicts the intricacies of a day in the park. But, when it comes to solving a math equation, Eliana struggles a bit. It is still your job to make sure that Eliana can solve for "x" in the equation but maybe the way you teach her, changes. Maybe you take into account her love for art and drawing and incorporate it into the math lesson.

### Meet Her Where She is and Scaffold her Growth

This is very much an educational concept but one that can serve you well throughout your life. Individualize your response to the people in your life and your relationships will blossom because of this. When I get to know someone, I learn their faults and their abilities. If I can adjust my expectations to meet the individual needs, I have a much more fulfilling interaction.

This is a huge ask. I recognize that. And is it always possible? No, it isn't. But if you can adjust your expectations to meet an individual's needs, everyone will come out on top. I am setting the stage for you to let go of your preconceived notions so that in my next WOW, I will talk more about what those accommodations can look like, especially for someone who has been diagnosed with autism or is neurodiverse. And while those adjustments won't always work, they might help even with someone who hasn't been diagnosed.

Shabbat Shalom.