



# Brain Matters

## Find support for yourself and help support others

Being neurodivergent in a neurotypical world can be overwhelming. Finding support can also be challenging.

The final edition of our neurodiversity series, **Brain Matters**, offers tips and practical strategies for managing everyday situations. Whether you need ideas for yourself or are looking to support someone else, you're not alone—there are places to turn for guidance.

Here's an overview of the series:

### Part 1 Awareness

The **February edition** introduced the concept of neurodiversity. It also explored some of the personal challenges and common misconceptions about being neurodivergent.

### Part 2 Empowerment

Knowledge is power. This edition provides resources to empower you and to support neurodiversity. In this edition, learn about:

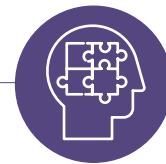
[Making transitions easier](#)

[Learning to use emotional co-regulation](#)

[Adjusting the physical work setting](#)

[How managers/supervisors can help](#)

[Explore PEBB's Neurodiversity Resource Library](#)



### What does neurodiversity mean?

It means that different brains work differently. Each brain processes, learns, and behaves in a unique way.

### Why is PEBB talking about neurodiversity?

PEBB created this series to address member feedback, support diversity, and share helpful resources.

You are here!

# Making transitions easier

Transitions can be difficult. A transition is an interruption during an activity that requires you to make a change.

We face transitions everyday. It might be a small transition like stopping to answer the phone while you were typing an email. Ending the day at work and traveling home is a bigger transition.

Transitions can be predictable or unexpected. Creating predictable routines can help make transitions easier.

Here are some ideas to help with transitions:

- 1 Make a plan:** At the end of each day, plan what will happen the following day. Big tasks can be overwhelming, so break them into smaller steps. Then you can decide which ones are a priority for the next day.
- 2 Create a structure:** Make sure recurring activities are done in predictable ways. For a child, this might mean having a structured bedtime routine. For a friend, it might mean planning ahead for when you get together, rather than showing up unannounced.
- 3 Prepare for the task:** Before starting something new, gather everything you'll need to complete the task. This causes you to think about the required steps and get your brain ready to do something new.
- 4 Schedule buffer time:** In between activities, appointments, and meetings, schedule 15 minutes to transition from one thing to the next. This break signals something new is about to happen.
- 5 Be flexible when needed:** If things aren't going as planned, stay in the moment. Connect with what's happening now and try to adjust your plan.
- 6 Advocate for accommodations:** If you notice someone struggling, identify others who might be able to help. For example, ask your child's teacher to give them more time to complete a test. If individuals on your team need more flexibility but you are unsure how to proceed, reach out to your manager for help.

## What helps you reach your full potential?

These factors influence everyone. Neurodiversity may affect their impact.



# Learning to use emotional co-regulation

Emotional self-regulation is the ability to manage your own nervous system. The nervous system produces feelings and emotions.

Have you ever experienced a moment of extreme stress and been able to calm yourself by taking deep breaths? In that instance, you were practicing self-regulation.

This can be challenging to do alone. When we're in distress, it can feel like chaos in the brain. This makes it difficult to access problem-solving skills. Sometimes we need help from others. This help is called co-regulation.

Co-regulation is using your nervous system to help someone else calm their nervous system. When you calm yourself, it encourages the other person to do the same. Their brain will mirror your emotional state, creating a calming effect.

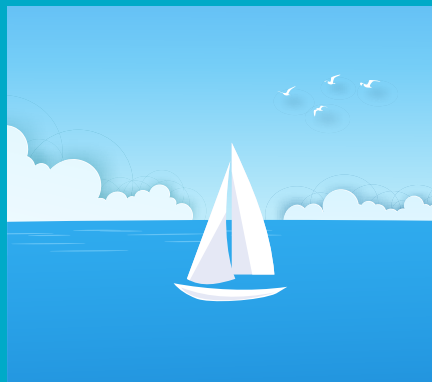
Here are some ways to provide co-regulation to someone who is having a difficult time self-regulating.

- ✔ Focus on your response instead of reacting.
- ✔ Soften your facial expression.
- ✔ Use a tender tone of voice.
- ✔ In a calm voice say, "You're safe right now."
- ✔ Ask what's going on and what you can do to help.
- ✔ Stop talking and listen without judgement.
- ✔ Model deep breathing, or breathe together.
- ✔ See if they want to walk outside or need a change of scenery.
- ✔ If physical touch is welcome and wanted, hold their hand or offer a hug.

## Meet their storms with kindness and compassion



When their storm



meets our calm



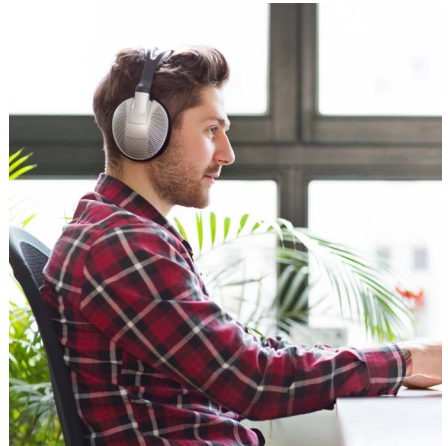
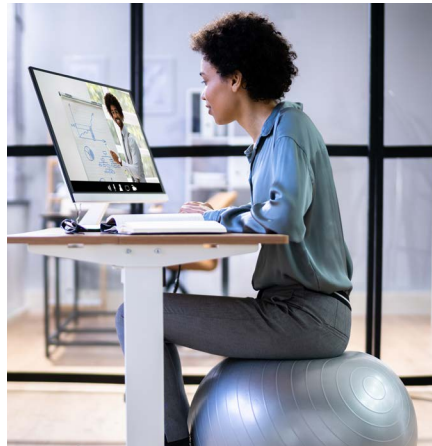
co-regulation occurs

# Adjusting the physical work setting

The physical work environment might be set up with the assumption that all people function in the same way. For some people, however, the typical work environment can cause overstimulation.

Accommodations can be made to improve work productivity. Examples include adjusting the lighting, workspace ergonomics, finding alternatives to loud or motion-heavy areas, and identifying assistive technologies. “Reasonable workplace accommodations” are described in the Americans with Disabilities Act.

To request an accommodation, contact your manager.



# How managers/supervisors can help

Here are some tips for managers/supervisors to help accommodate their team’s needs.

- **Create a culture where people can be themselves.** When your team knows you value diversity, they’ll be more likely to trust you and ask for help when they need it.
- **Ask questions (and listen).** If you’re not sure how best to support your team, ask them.
  - Listen to input on how to meet their individual needs.
  - Set them up for success by identifying and removing barriers.
  - Learn about their preferred setting for concentration.
  - Create spaces that provide stimulation breaks.
  - Use co-regulation to help calm a distressed team member.
- **Support peoples’ superpowers.** Get curious. Pay attention to each team member’s unique skill set and leverage their superpowers. Understanding their strengths and weaknesses allows you to build a strong team overall.





# Explore PEBB's Neurodiversity Resource Library

Here's a preview of the resources you'll find in [PEBB's Neurodiversity Resource Library](#). There's something for everyone!

- **Local, State, and PEBB resources:** Based on what's going on in your life at any moment, the type of support you need may vary. There are general resources available through local organizations, the State, and also through PEBB's benefit programs.

Each of PEBB's medical plans offers services to identify and support neurodiversity.

- **Additional resources for managers/supervisors:** Dig a little deeper into building an inclusive culture in your team by learning about neurodiversity.
- **In-person and online groups:** Community is key! We've identified groups to help you connect with people who understand what you're going through. These groups provide an opportunity to share stories, voice opinions, and ask for advice.
- **Websites:** Maybe you don't know what type of information you're looking for yet. Starting with a website specific to a topic of interest may be just what you need.
- **Books:** Some self-help books focus on neurodiversity. Plus, there are lots of books with neurodivergent characters that you can learn from.
- **YouTube:** Routines can be essential for neurodivergent minds. But the key is that they need to be sustainable routines. There are many resources on YouTube that show creative systems to help set you up for success. Explore ideas for building a morning routine that gets you where you need to be—on time! Or, get meal prep tips to help reduce the everyday demands of cooking.

## Books for kids

There are many children's books to help start a conversation about neurodiversity with kids.





- **Instagram:** Scroll through bite-sized content that's broken down into simple terms. It generally requires very little time. Whatever you're interested in, you'll find short and engaging visuals/videos about everyday tips and tricks.
- **Apps:** Daily reminders can keep you on track. An app can provide daily accountability for things like learning new skills, organizing daily activities, and managing your mental health. Many apps offer a virtual community to connect with others like you.
- **Podcasts:** One of the easiest ways to learn new things is by listening to podcasts. Listen while you're driving, exercising, or doing household chores.



## A note about our library's sources

We included information from an array of sources—from clinical experts to people sharing their lived experiences. Our intent is to help you get additional support and find connections with others. The resources provided are not a substitute for professional care.

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