



NEURO- AFFIRMING LEARNING CHECKLIST

Practical ways to create calmer,
kinder, and more connected
learning environments — at home
or in the classroom.

by Sandra Littlejohn

What “Neuro-Affirming” Means

Being neuro-affirming means honoring how each brain learns, feels, and processes differently — without judgment or comparison. It's about shifting from control to connection, from “fixing” to supporting, and from compliance to curiosity.

AT HOME & IN THE CLASSROOM

1. Recognize and Respect Neurodivergent Individuals

- ☐ I acknowledge that every brain learns and experiences the world differently.
- ☐ I use affirming language and avoid labels like “lazy” or “defiant.”
- ☐ I teach children that differences in attention, movement, and emotion are normal variations of being human.
- ☐ I model empathy and curiosity about what each child needs to feel safe and successful.

2. Create Sensory-Safe Spaces

- ☐ The environment includes calm colors, soft lighting, and minimal clutter.
- ☐ There's a designated “quiet” or “reset” area when overwhelm hits.
- ☐ Fidgets, noise-canceling headphones, or chewable tools are available and normalized.
- ☐ I observe sensory triggers (sound, touch, smells, light) and adjust routines accordingly.

3. Focus on Strengths

- ☐ I notice what my child or student can do, not just what's hard.
- ☐ Lessons or tasks build on interests and natural talents.
- ☐ I celebrate effort and creativity, not just productivity.
- ☐ I view "meltdowns" as communication, not manipulation.

4. Build Flexible Routines

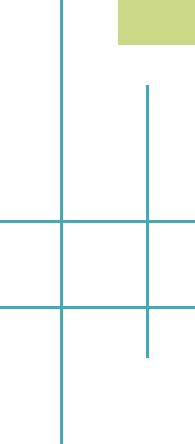
- ☐ Daily plans include flexibility for breaks, rest, and movement.
- ☐ Visual schedules or short to-do lists help set expectations.
- ☐ I adjust pacing for attention, energy, or emotional needs.
- ☐ I treat plans as guides, not rigid rules.

5. Offer Multiple Ways to Learn

- ☐ Information is presented in several formats (visuals, audio, written, hands-on).
- ☐ Students can show learning through projects, drawings, presentations, or discussions.
- ☐ I use choice boards, menus, or alternative assignments when possible.
- ☐ I value process over perfection — learning counts even when it looks different.

6. Support Emotional and Sensory Regulation

- ☐ I help children identify their feelings without shame.
- ☐ I use co-regulation: modeling calm breathing, pauses, and self-compassion.
- ☐ Breaks, movement, or grounding activities are part of the routine, not rewards.
- ☐ I teach simple coping strategies (deep breathing, stretching, journaling, time alone).



7. Encourage Connection and Belonging

- ☐ We celebrate differences as strengths.
- ☐ Shared-interest clubs, projects, or playtimes help kids connect authentically.
- ☐ I highlight neurodivergent authors, inventors, and creators in stories or lessons.
- ☐ I use affirming stories that reinforce “There’s no one right way to learn or be.”

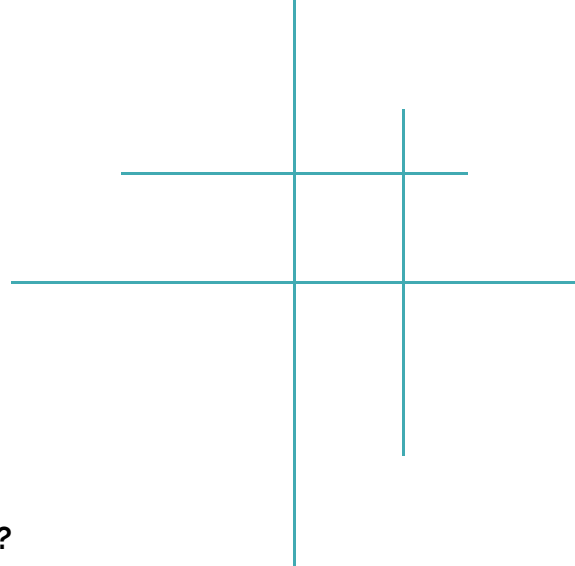
8. Partner with the Child or Student

- ☐ I ask for their input about what helps or hurts their focus.
- ☐ We problem-solve together instead of imposing consequences alone.
- ☐ I give realistic choices to build autonomy and trust.
- ☐ I involve them in creating their own “regulation toolkit.”

9. Reframe Success

- ☐ Progress is measured by growth and emotional safety, not by grades or compliance.
 - ☐ I redefine “a good day” as one where connection was maintained.
 - ☐ I remind myself that regulation comes before learning — always.
 - ☐ I celebrate small wins and moments of resilience.
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Reflection Prompts



What's one sensory adjustment I could make this week?

What's one way I can make our learning space feel safer?

What's one belief I can release about what "good learning" looks like?

