



Understanding Neuroaffirming Therapy



Neuroaffirming therapy is a way of working with neurodivergent kids (like those with autism or ADHD) that emphasizes accepting them as they are instead of trying to "fix" them. It challenges the idea that neurodivergence is a problem and instead focuses on accommodations and self-advocacy.

While this approach has positive aspects, it can sometimes overlook teaching critical life skills that kids need to navigate the world independently.

Where Neuroaffirming Therapy Falls Short

While it's great to embrace your child's identity, completely rejecting traditional therapy methods can backfire. Here's why:

- **Avoids Teaching Social Skills:** Some neuroaffirming approaches argue against teaching kids how to navigate social interactions. But understanding basic social cues and communication styles can make life easier for them.
- **Ignores Real-World Challenges:** The world isn't built for neurodivergent people. Without strategies to navigate common hurdles, they may struggle in school, work, and relationships.
- **Rejects Structure & Routine:** Many neuroaffirming therapists push back against structured learning, even though many neurodivergent kids thrive with predictability.



Talk Therapy and Autistic Individuals

Traditional talk therapy is often recommended for emotional regulation and mental health support, but it can be **ineffective** for autistic individuals, particularly due to **alexithymia** (*difficulty identifying and expressing emotions*). This can make it challenging for them to engage in verbal processing-focused therapies.

However, alternative approaches like **somatic therapies**, such as movement-based therapy, sensory integration, or breathwork, can be more effective. These methods focus on **bodily awareness and regulation** rather than verbal expression, making them more accessible and beneficial for many autistic individuals.

What Kids Actually Need: A Balanced Approach

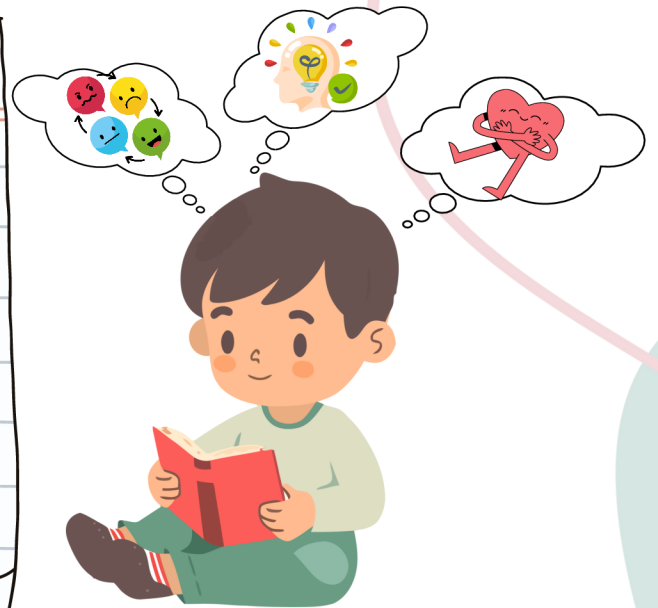
Instead of fully buying into neuroaffirming therapy, consider a middle ground that blends acceptance with practical skill-building:

✓ Practical Life Skills:

Teaching kids how to manage emotions, communicate effectively, and handle sensory challenges.

Examples:

- Using emotion charts or mindfulness techniques to help regulate feelings.
- Practicing scripts for self-advocacy with teachers or peers.
- Encouraging self-care habits like taking breaks or using noise-canceling headphones.



✓ Support, Not Just Acceptance:

Accepting neurodivergence is great, but kids also need tools to function in daily life.

Examples:

- Teaching organization skills for schoolwork and routines.
- Helping with coping strategies for sensory overload (e.g., deep breathing, quiet spaces).
- Encouraging problem-solving to handle changes in routine or misunderstandings with others.



✓ Flexibility: Not all neurodivergent kids need the same thing.

Some thrive with structure, others with more independence.

Examples:

- Using visual schedules for those who need structure but allowing flexibility when needed.
- Letting kids choose how they communicate (verbal, written, or AAC devices).
- Adjusting expectations based on their learning style rather than forcing one-size-fits-all methods.



Finding the Right Support

If you're looking for therapy that actually helps your child, here's what to look for:

- A therapist who values both acceptance and skill-building.
- An approach that teaches social skills while respecting your child's unique way of communicating.
- Support that includes sensory accommodations but also prepares them for real-world expectations.

The Bottom Line



Neuroaffirming therapy isn't all bad, but it can miss the mark in preparing kids for adulthood. It's important to balance acceptance with real-life skills so your child can thrive in a world that isn't always built for them. Find a middle ground that provides both emotional support and practical tools.



Additional Reading for Parents

For parents who want to better understand autism from autistic perspectives, here are three highly recommended books:

- 📖 **"Unmasking Autism"** by Devon Price – Explores the hidden struggles of autistic individuals who mask their traits to fit in and provides insights on embracing neurodivergence.
- 📖 **"NeuroTribes"** by Steve Silberman – A deep dive into the history of autism, misconceptions, and the importance of neurodiversity in society.
- 📖 **"Divergent Mind"** by Jenara Nerenberg – Focuses on neurodivergence in women and nonbinary people, breaking down how autism and ADHD present differently in them.

These books can help parents shift their understanding of autism and neurodivergence while offering guidance on how to best support their child's unique needs.

