

Supporting Neurodivergent Students in Higher Education

Creating Inclusive,
Responsive, and
Legally-Sound
Environments

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Agenda

1. Understanding Neurodiversity

2. Campus and Exam Support

3. Handling Meltdowns

4. Institutional Integration

5. Academic Awareness

6. Co-Morbidities

7. Resource-Sensitive Strategies

8. Legal & Policy Frameworks



Global Prevalence of Neurodivergence

- - 15–20% of the global population estimated to be neurodivergent.
 - - Includes autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, and Tourette's.
 - - Increasing visibility and awareness driving diagnostic rates.
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Global Data Breakdown

- - Autism: ~1% globally (1 in 100 children).
 - - ADHD: 5–8% of children; 2.6–6.8% of adults.
 - - Dyslexia: 3–7% diagnosed; up to 20% show symptoms.
 - - Dyscalculia, dysgraphia also contribute to global figures.
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ZA South Africa-Specific Data

- - 3–5% of learners with learning disabilities.
 - - Autism affects approx. 2–5% of population.
 - - 2015 study (learners with disabilities):
 - 17% had ADHD
 - 23% had dyslexia
 - - National campus-level statistics remain limited.
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Trends & Diagnostic Insights

- - Autism diagnoses rose from ~0.05% to 1–3% over 40 years.
 - - ADHD diagnoses increasing, especially in youth.
 - - Experts suggest rise due to better detection, not just prevalence.
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Summary Table

Type	Global Estimate	South Africa Estimate
Neurodivergent overall	15–20%	—
Autism (ASD)	~1%	2–5%
ADHD	5–8% (children), 2.6–6.8% (adults)	17% of disabled learners
Learning Disabilities	3–7% (dyslexia), up to 20% symptoms	3–5% of learners



Implications for Higher Education

- - Neurodivergence affects 1 in 5 individuals.
 - - HE institutions must prioritize inclusion, support, and clear policies.
 - - More students will need accommodations and tailored services.
 - - South Africa's data shows the urgency for robust disability frameworks.
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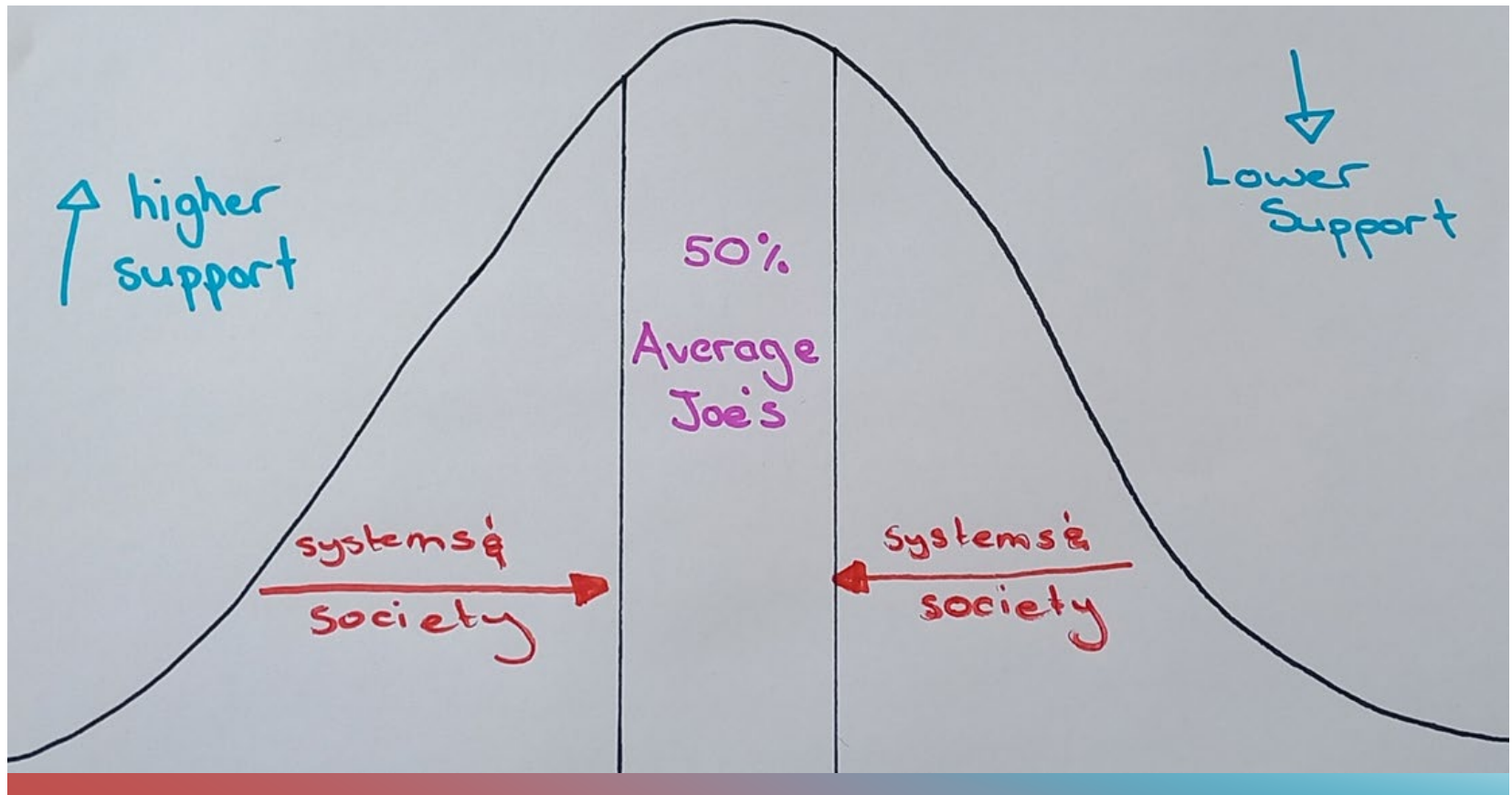
Understanding Neurodiversity



Neurodiversity refers to natural variations in cognitive functioning, including Autism, ADHD, Dyslexia, etc.



- Traits: Sensory sensitivities, executive functioning challenges, attention variability, etc.



The Myth of Normal

Disability Unit Support on Campus

In Classrooms: Assistive tech, flexible attendance, clear routines.



During Exams: Extra time, breaks, tech support, quiet venues.



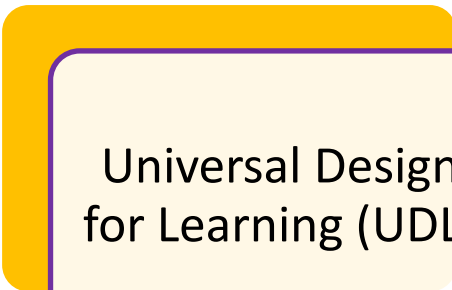
Campus Life: Sensory zones, peer support, simplified admin.

Supporting Students During Meltdowns

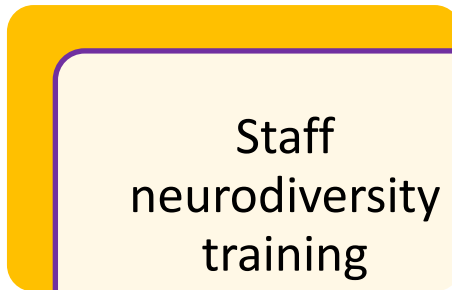




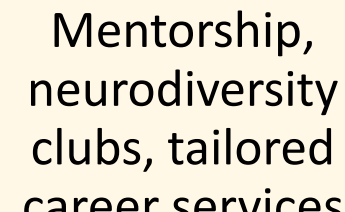
Institutional Integration Strategies



Universal Design
for Learning (UDL)



Staff
neurodiversity
training



Mentorship,
neurodiversity
clubs, tailored
career services

What is Universal Design for Learning (UDL)?

UDL IS A PROACTIVE EDUCATIONAL FRAMEWORK
AIMED AT REMOVING LEARNING BARRIERS BY:



- PROVIDING MULTIPLE MEANS OF REPRESENTATION (WHAT WE TEACH)



- OFFERING MULTIPLE MEANS OF ACTION AND EXPRESSION (HOW STUDENTS RESPOND)



- CREATING MULTIPLE MEANS OF ENGAGEMENT (WHY STUDENTS LEARN)



Core Principles of UDL

- 1. Multiple Means of Representation:
 - Visuals, audio, simplified language, scaffolds
 - 2. Multiple Means of Action and Expression:
 - Written, oral, artistic, or digital outputs
 - 3. Multiple Means of Engagement:
 - Choice, autonomy, emotional relevance
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Goal of UDL

UDL aims to design flexible learning environments from the start



to accommodate diverse learning styles and needs.



It supports all students—neurotypical and neurodivergent—



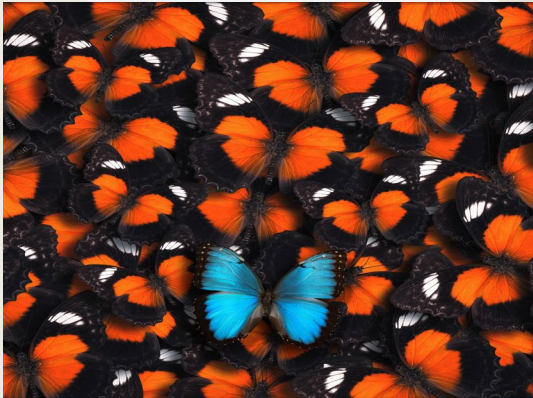
without needing individual retroactive accommodations.



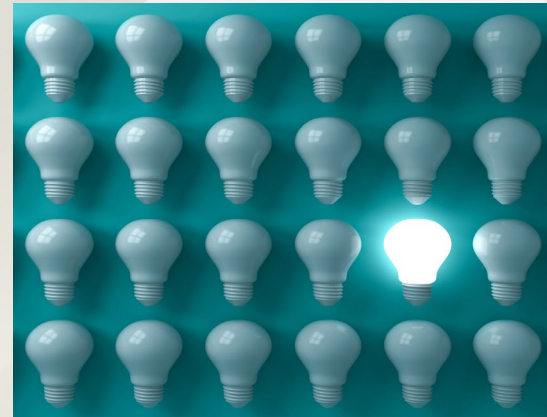
UDL vs Traditional Teaching

Traditional Teaching	UDL Approach
One-size-fits-all content	Flexible content delivery
Fixed assessments	Multiple ways to demonstrate learning
Focus on remediation	Focus on removing barriers
Accessibility added later	Accessibility embedded from the start

Academic Staff Awareness



RECOGNIZE UNIQUENESS, AVOID
ASSUMPTIONS, PROVIDE FLEXIBLE
ASSESSMENTS.



STRENGTHS-BASED MINDSET: MANY
STUDENTS EXCEL IN CREATIVITY AND
SYSTEMS THINKING.



ANXIETY,



DEPRESSION,



PTSD,



LEARNING
DISORDERS,



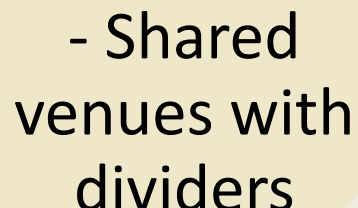
SENSORY
PROCESSING ISSUES,



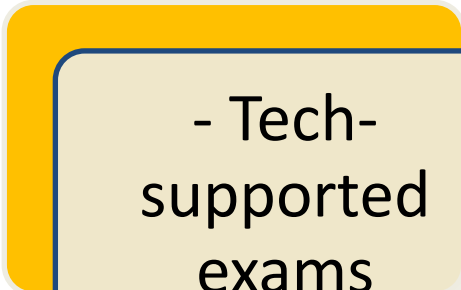
SLEEP PROBLEMS.



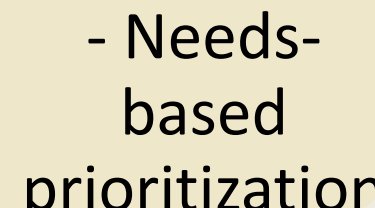
Tailoring Support with Limited Resources



- Shared venues with dividers



- Tech-supported exams



- Needs-based prioritization

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Legal and Policy Considerations

- SA Frameworks: PEPUDA, White Paper on Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Higher Ed Act.
 - - Right to reasonable accommodation
 - - Confidentiality and anti-discrimination policies
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**Neurodiversity
is the new
normal**

“Think Different”

