

Inclusive Education for Neurodiverse Ākonga

GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS



Grow
Waitaha



This guide is intended to accompany the literature review and interview findings published by Grow Waitaha.

The following are areas where schools and kaiako may develop their inclusive practice for neurodiverse ākonga:

- **Prioritising and valuing relationships**
- **Developing learner agency**
- **Supporting ākonga to understand and manage their own behaviour**
- **Creating inclusive environments**
- **Embedding inclusive teaching strategies**
- **Supporting ākonga transitions**

In each of these areas, we've summarised the recommendations from the review and included some top tips for kaiako to implement inclusive practice. This might include some things that

kaiako have not considered, or have considered but not tried. Some websites and resources are provided as a guide for kaiako.

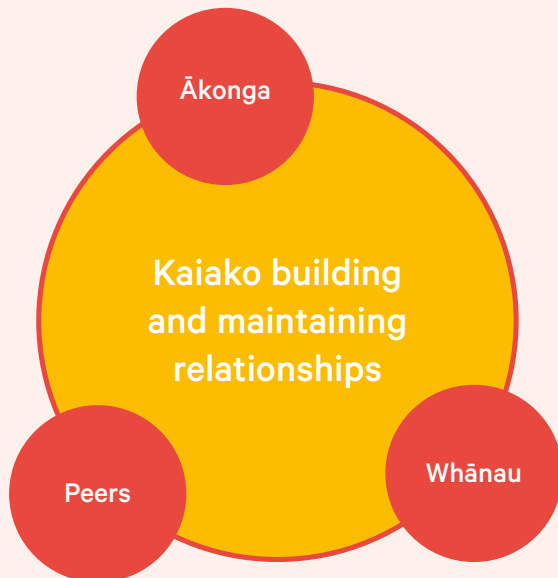
It is important to note that recommendations and top tips are not universal. They are based on research and feedback from experienced educators. All ākonga have individual needs and different things that will work well for them or improve their educational experience. It is important to build meaningful relationships to understand what different ākonga need and what will work well for them, and with understanding, apply different recommendations and top tips that cater to the unique needs presented by ākonga. As is highlighted throughout this document, variety and experimentation is often helpful.

Also, note that some things that are presented as beneficial to neurodiverse ākonga will not be beneficial to all neurodiverse ākonga.



Prioritising and Valuing Relationships

Relationships are frequently reported as the most important aspect of inclusive education for neurodiverse ākonga. This largely boiled down to knowing the learner and understanding their individual needs to be able to handle various behavioural situations and enable them to learn in the conditions that are necessary for them.



Kaiako play an important role in building and maintaining relationships with these interacting groups. That means building relationships with ākonga, connecting them with peers, and supporting open communication between kaiako and whānau.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Use social activities, games, and play to get to know each learner as an individual and encourage peer-to-peer social interactions.



Establish buddies (with other neurodiverse and neurotypical students) to help teach and encourage prosocial behaviours.



Play to the strengths of learners, using different tools to assist them in social situations.



Monitor social interactions and play a mediating role in keeping social activities and conversations civil and on-task.



Include whānau from the beginning in planning and goal-setting.



Maintain relationships with whānau and guardians, including them in the day-to-day management of behaviours and keeping them well-informed.



Establish systems of maintaining accurate records of learner diagnoses and backgrounds.



Utilise student leaders (e.g. prefects) to help facilitate social interactions and games with neurodiverse learners.



Utilise individual and whānau planning tools to map paths to individual success with the learners and their whānau involved in this process.

Prioritising and Valuing Relationships



TOP TIPS FOR KAIAKO

When doing icebreaker activities, share information about yourself as well, particularly information that may be of interest to class members.

Take notes of student interests and strengths. A 'cheat sheet' may be a helpful document so that you can write these details next to student names as you get to know them.

Play to ākongā strengths by offering a range of activities. Try to find activities where all ākongā get the opportunity to be the expert.

When engaging in goal-setting with ākongā and whānau, follow up on those goals regularly and keep the conversations informal and ongoing throughout the year.

Take different opportunities to build a connection with ākongā. Welcome them by name, incorporate their culture and native language, play social games, use creative activities, provide feedback, and regularly check in with them.

Establishing a buddy system for ākongā doesn't necessarily mean assigning a conscientious student to be a buddy to neurodiverse ākongā, but can be achieved at a lower level through having a carefully designed seating plan or by grouping ākongā in various activities to mix neurodiverse and neurotypical with complementary personalities or skills/interests.

Share strategies with whānau so that good practice can continue at home, and have them share effective strategies with you.

WEBSITES AND RESOURCES

Neurodiversity: A strengths-based approach to teaching diverse learners

theeducationhub.org.nz/neurodiversity-a-strengths-based-approach-to-teaching-diverse-learners

PATH: Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope

www.pathplanning.nz

communityresearch.org.nz/webinar/pathplanning

Developing Learner Agency

For many neurodiverse learners, learning can occur differently and the process may seem much slower. There needs to be explicit teaching and a lot of repetition. This includes making explicit the purpose and process of learning so that neurodiverse ākonga can begin to make aspects of learning more automatic and start to take control over their own learning.

This includes honing their strengths and exploring their interests.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Set and monitor academic goals (with the learner and their whānau/guardians).



Teach learning/academic skills and independent skills as part of their regular teaching and learning.



Put plans in place that can be revised when needed and give learners oversight of their progress.



Offer learners alternative options to tasks and ensure they always have something they can do to learn, even if it is not what others are doing.



Teach learners why their learning is important so they understand the purpose in ways that are meaningful to them.



Ensure that learners know what support is available and how to ask for what they need.



Segment learning tasks into smaller, explicit and doable tasks and have learners repeat steps often.

Developing Learner Agency



TOP TIPS FOR KAIAKO

Consider what agency looks like for each neurodiverse learner. For some, it might be unpacking their backpack without being asked or sitting in the right seat as class starts. By developing those more simple, earlier skills, we can start to build agency in other areas.

When considering the purpose of learning for ākongā, consider how this can be included in learning plans so that their progress throughout the year becomes more meaningful to them and their purpose at school.

Remember that everyone needs tasks to be repeated for them to become automatic, but some neurodiverse ākongā may need tasks repeated for them a lot more. Consider frequent repetition and always show patience when building agency.

WEBSITES AND RESOURCES

Supporting neurodiverse learners to demonstrate their intellect and capability

<https://theeducationhub.org.nz/supporting-neurodiverse-learners-to-demonstrate-their-intellect-and-capability/schools-webinar-supporting-neurodiverse-learners-to-demonstrate-their-intellect-and-capability/>

Learner agency

<https://elearning.tki.org.nz/Teaching/Learner-agency>

Supporting Ākonga to Understand and Manage Their Own Behaviour

Some neurodiverse conditions can present themselves with behaviours that would be perceived as inappropriate in neurotypical situations. Schools and kaiako tend to support the use of restorative practices, focusing on repairing and maintaining positive relationships in the face of difficult or disruptive behaviours.

Through being restorative and reinforcing positive behaviours, kaiako can support neurodiverse ākonga to understand their behaviours and learn to self-regulate.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Address antisocial and inappropriate behaviour within a restorative framework, helping neurodiverse learners understand others' perspectives and help them to repair relationships.



Teach students about behaviours and why they occur.



Have high standards of safety for the classroom and have techniques to de-escalate behaviour.



Teachers should try to understand the behaviour and why it is happening, e.g. external factors that might explain the behaviour and signal areas a learner needs support.



Social stories may be a particularly helpful tool to help neurodiverse learners understand their behaviours.



Quickly assess different behaviours for their nature and whether they should be ignored or quickly de-escalated.



Incorporate parents and whānau where possible to help understand the behaviour at home, give them behaviour management techniques, and learn about techniques that are helpful at home.



Explicitly teach and reinforce prosocial and positive behaviours.



Incorporate self-regulation techniques explicitly into the curriculum.



Where possible, place neurodiverse learners in environments where prosocial behaviour is modelled.

Supporting Ākonga to Understand and Manage Their Own Behaviour



TOP TIPS FOR KAIAKO

Practice your ABCs: The Antecedent, the Behaviour, and the Consequence. Consider what caused the behaviour to happen, how the behaviour was shown, and what result that had, such as disruption or danger. Help ākonga understand these as part of a restorative framework.

Use de-escalation techniques, such as providing a breakout space, having a quiet supervised area, having a sensory play area or whatever you need to get neurodiverse ākonga to calm themselves. If you adapt to the triggers, you may utilise de-escalation before the behaviour reaches its extreme.

Consider difficult behaviours as a potential symptom of something else. Ask yourself, “What is this behaviour trying to tell me?”. Consider the different sensory needs of neurodiverse ākonga and what could be changed in their teaching and learning environment that could assist them to self-regulate.

Help the class understand behaviours. For example, the hand model (link included in the resources) can be a helpful tool to understand the brain and how people can lose their executive, logical thinking that results in sudden outbursts of emotions.

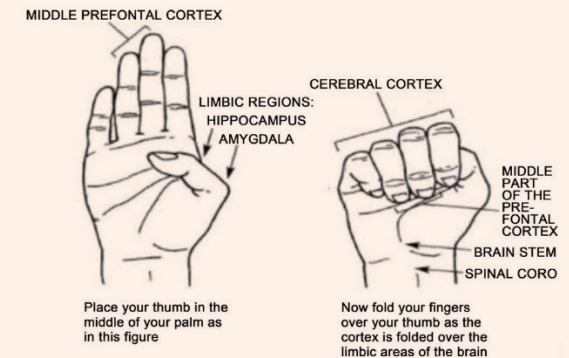
The saying “it takes a village” applies to behaviour management and regulation. Build networks with whānau, peers, and other teaching staff to help understand behaviour and promote techniques that have worked well for regulation in various contexts.

Social stories have been frequently recommended by experienced teachers. However, make sure the social stories are individual to the learner (not mass-produced), helping them understand their behaviour and the behaviour of those around them. Ensure stories recognise the individual differences of neurodiverse ākonga and avoid making them about assimilating with neurotypical behaviours (e.g. sitting quietly, not fidgeting etc.).

WEBSITES AND RESOURCES

Dan Siegal: the Hand Model

www.youtube.com/watch?v=gm9CIJ74Oxw&ab_channel=FtMyersFamPsych



Retrieved from:

www.researchgate.net/figure/The-hand-model-of-the-brain-Siegel-2010_fig1_325335046

Social stories

raisingchildren.net.au/autism/therapies-guide/social-stories

lifeskillsadvocate.com/blog/how-to-write-a-social-story

neuroclastic.com/social-stories-for-autism

Creating Inclusive Environments

The learning environment itself is a crucial piece of the puzzle when it comes to supporting learning for neurodiverse ākonga. Kaiako may have little control over the physical design of the learning space (i.e. during master planning) but may influence some of the day-to-day features of the learning space such as light and sound.

In general, structured environments tend to be favoured for neurodiverse learners, so kaiako may look for opportunities to structure and add predictability to their learning spaces.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Regardless of whether teaching in a single-cell or innovative learning environment, learning spaces should be adaptable for individual sensory needs.



Remove clutter prior to learners arriving and clear thoroughfares to ensure learners can move unimpeded.



Breakout spaces should be utilised, and where not available, some space should be designated for de-escalation.



Be prepared for learners to arrive by being at the front of the class to greet them consistently.



Include a range of furniture options such as bean bags.



Include sensory objects, toys, stationery etc. in the learning space.



Include visual cues around the classroom and make these clear to learners.

Creating Inclusive Environments



TOP TIPS FOR KAIAKO

For kaiako operating in flexible learning spaces, look for aspects where predictability can be added. This includes seating arrangements, where kaiako are positioned, and where the whiteboard and other focal points are positioned. As the learning environment changing may disorient some neurodiverse ākonga, having elements that stay 'fixed' may make a big difference for some.

Look for opportunities in your learning space. For example, a corner where sensory toys and furniture might be stored, an area where ākonga may be separated from the noise and busyness of the classroom, an area where ākonga can work alone or with others if they need an alternative learning task, etc. Partitions or creative use/configuration of furniture may enable different sensory spaces.

The key word is variety. A variety of seating options, configurations, pen/pencil grips, toys, colours, textures etc. Allow for variety and experimentation and see what physical elements and resources are working well for ākonga. This doesn't mean to keep changing the environment, but have different components that can be utilised so ākonga can find what works for them.

WEBSITES AND RESOURCES

Creating a sensory-friendly classroom

<https://kiddipedia.com.au/creating-a-sensory-friendly-classroom/>

Design for neurodiverse learners

<https://www.td.org/magazines/td-magazine/design-for-neurodiverse-learners>

Embedding Inclusive Teaching Strategies

The previous sections lead to effective teaching and learning as they could be considered enabling factors. Building strong, meaningful relationships, having enabling learning environments, having systems to regulate behaviour, and developing ākongā as independent learners allows for good teaching and learning to occur.

Largely, kaiako should consider structured learning and Universal Design for Learning (UDL). There are several different resources, techniques and methods kaiako can employ in their learning environments to support learning for neurodiverse ākongā.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Be adaptable in matching learning tasks to the individual learners, their needs and their strengths.



Be flexible and adaptive to potential changes based on what works well and what does not.



Use a range of instruction methods, including visual, role play, rehearsal, tactile, play etc.



Universal Design for Learning (UDL) may be helpful in many cases to cater to the individual needs of neurodiverse learners.



Use a range of assessment tools, not necessarily relying on standardised testing kits that are matched to neurotypical learners.



Assessment tools, such as LASS, may help create profiles for learners where they do not necessarily have diagnoses.



Break learning tasks into smaller, doable steps.



Attach goals to tasks (strategically using SMART goals) to help learners feel a sense of achievement in their learning.



Chunk learning, including numerous learning breaks between chunks.



Utilise the physical aspects of literacy, including handwriting, page-turning, sounding out words etc.



Working on handwriting, forming letters and forming words may be a particularly useful tool to improve literacy.



Specific programmes including Socially Speaking, The Code, Steps Web, and the Pyramid of Learning (sensory hierarchy) have worked well for some participants.



Ensure targeted PLD equips staff to effectively teach neurodiverse learners.



Ensure PLD is also directed at teacher aides and others who directly work with neurodiverse learners.



Technology and assistive technology may be useful, particularly in helping learners access language such as through Roger devices, C-pens, and Google Read.



Work alongside whānau, take advice and provide them with tools to assist with learning at home.



Maintain transparent reporting relationships with whānau, including realistic reports of learning outcomes.

Embedding Inclusive Teaching Strategies



TOP TIPS FOR KAIAKO

Flexibility and adaptability are key. Ākonga have different strengths and interests that will engage them in learning. Allow for a range of activities, different mediums of explicit teaching, and find what works well for different ākonga. You could note these things on their record or cheat sheet or similar.

There are lots of physical and sensory aspects of learning. For example, sounding out words, turning pages, forming letters etc. Development of motor skills is also linked to literacy and may be an important way of supporting young neurodiverse learners to develop language capabilities.

There are a range of helpful online tools and services. Some are linked below. Experiment and find things that work well for ākonga. This includes development phonology, motor skills, vocabulary, fluency etc. Have ākonga monitor their progress and use these tools to co-develop goals with ākonga, and potentially their whānau.

Take some time to get to know the strengths and weaknesses of ākonga. For those who don't have a formal diagnosis of neurodiversity but show signs of neurodiversity, cognitive delay, specific learning difficulties etc., some forms of assessment (such as the LASS) may help identify strengths and weaknesses in learning to help structure the learning environment.

Keep in mind that typical assessment often won't suit neurodiverse ākonga. A timed test, for example, might not adequately assess the knowledge and capability of a neurodiverse learner. Consider what conditions might be necessary to assess their knowledge and skill and find ways to adapt assessment to the different needs of ākonga.

Form a relationship with whānau and support them to engage in ākonga learning. Provide regular feedback, update them on learning, include them in the teaching and learning process, listen to their goals and priorities, help them with learning at home etc. Transparency goes a long way and keeps learning consistent between the school and home environment.

WEBSITES AND RESOURCES

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/universal-design-for-learning/

ncea.education.govt.nz/universal-design-learning-udl

Structured learning

inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/dyslexia-and-learning/understanding-structured-literacy/

mytunbridgewells.com/structured-learning/

Assessment (LASS)

www.itecnz.co.nz/lucid-lass-8-11.html

www.education.unsw.edu.au/news-events/news/assessment-planning-neurodiverse-students

Goal setting

www.progressparade.com/blog/goal-setting-neurodiversity

Socially Speaking

www.sociallyspeaking.co.nz

The Code

www.lizkaneliteracy.co.nz/the-code

Steps Web

www.stepsweb.com

Pyramid of Learning

otplan.com/pyramid-of-learning

www.mindstory.com.my/blog/pyramid-of-learning-important-key-to-academic-learning

Transitions

The final area for discussion is transitions.

This is an important consideration for kaiako to ensure that ākongā are supported throughout their educational journey.

As kaiako would benefit from knowing their learner prior to their arrival, they can also afford this opportunity to their next schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Create and share detailed profiles of learners, including information that the next teacher/school may find helpful



Interviews and incoming tests may be helpful in some cases to determine what needs neurodiverse learners have



Collaborate with other schools, ensuring the next school knows how to support the incoming neurodiverse learner



Involve whānau where possible, including them in the transition process and using their expertise



Allow for neurodiverse learners to visit schools, allowing them to take someone to make them feel safe and supported



Explorative and play-based learning may be helpful in new school environments to develop social skills



Where possible, plan in advance, such as through making early applications and establishing school systems to support learners

Transitions



TOP TIPS FOR KAIAKO

Consider, “What would I want to know about ākonga before they arrive? How would I want to receive this information?”. This is the stuff that could prove very useful in their transition to the next school.

With information and tips included in this document, consider what might make the learning environment the most welcoming to neurodiverse ākonga.

Often, applications for support can take a long time. Start early where possible and take time to gather all the necessary information.

As neurodiverse ākonga enter the school, consider the information you would want to know and how to best find it out. Consider assessment, conversations, interviews, and how this information can be quickly gathered.

You should consider working alongside ākonga, their whānau, other kaiako, and the next school to set everything up for their transition.

WEBSITES AND RESOURCES

inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/transitions-managing-times-of-change

Contact details

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 www.facebook.com/growwaitaha



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