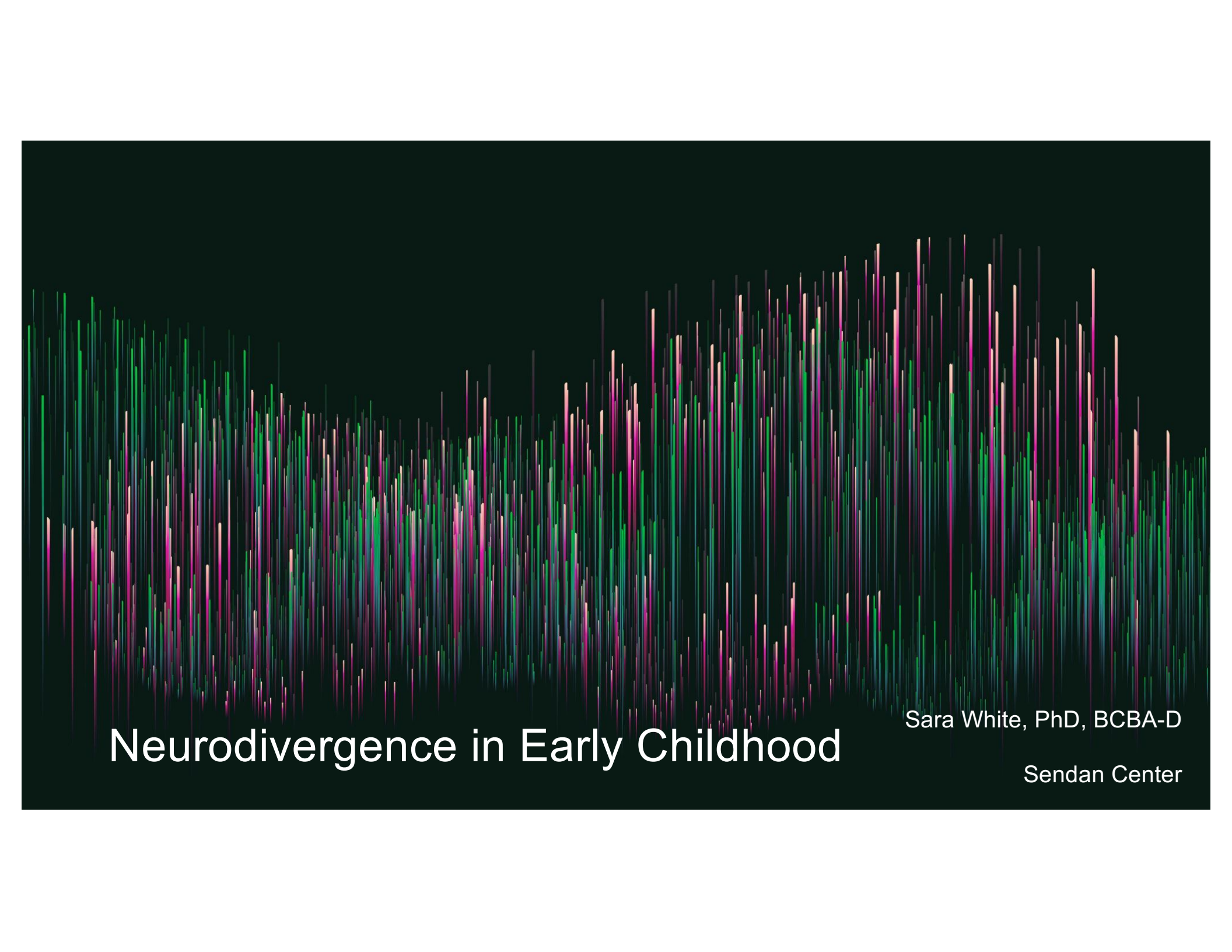




Neurodivergence in Early Childhood

Sara White, PhD, BCBA-D

Sendan Center

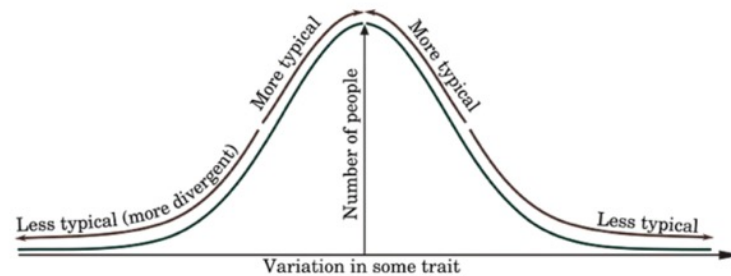


Neurodiversity

<https://togetherall.com/en-gb/support-articles/what-is-neurodiversity/>

When does
neurodiversity
become
neurodivergence?

Neurodivergence



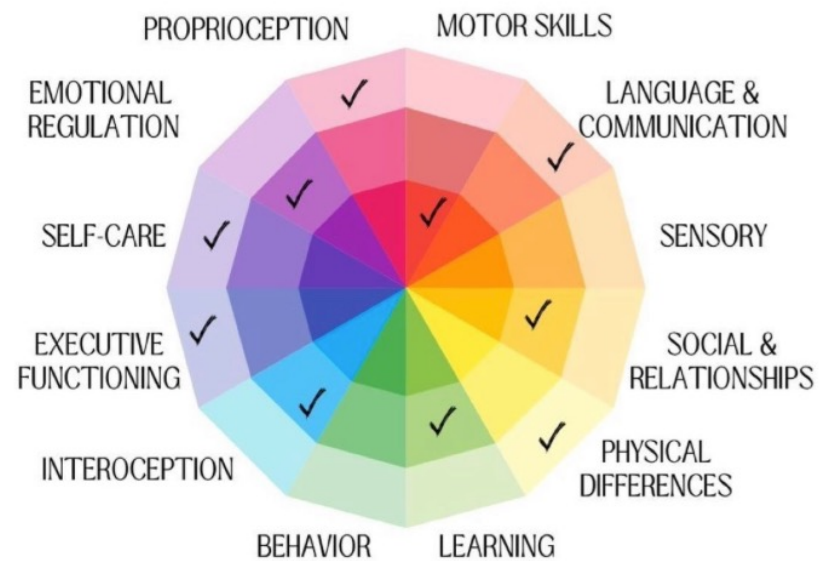
Given almost any trait, a minority of the population will diverge strongly from the average. There are many ways to diverge, so most people are atypical in some ways.

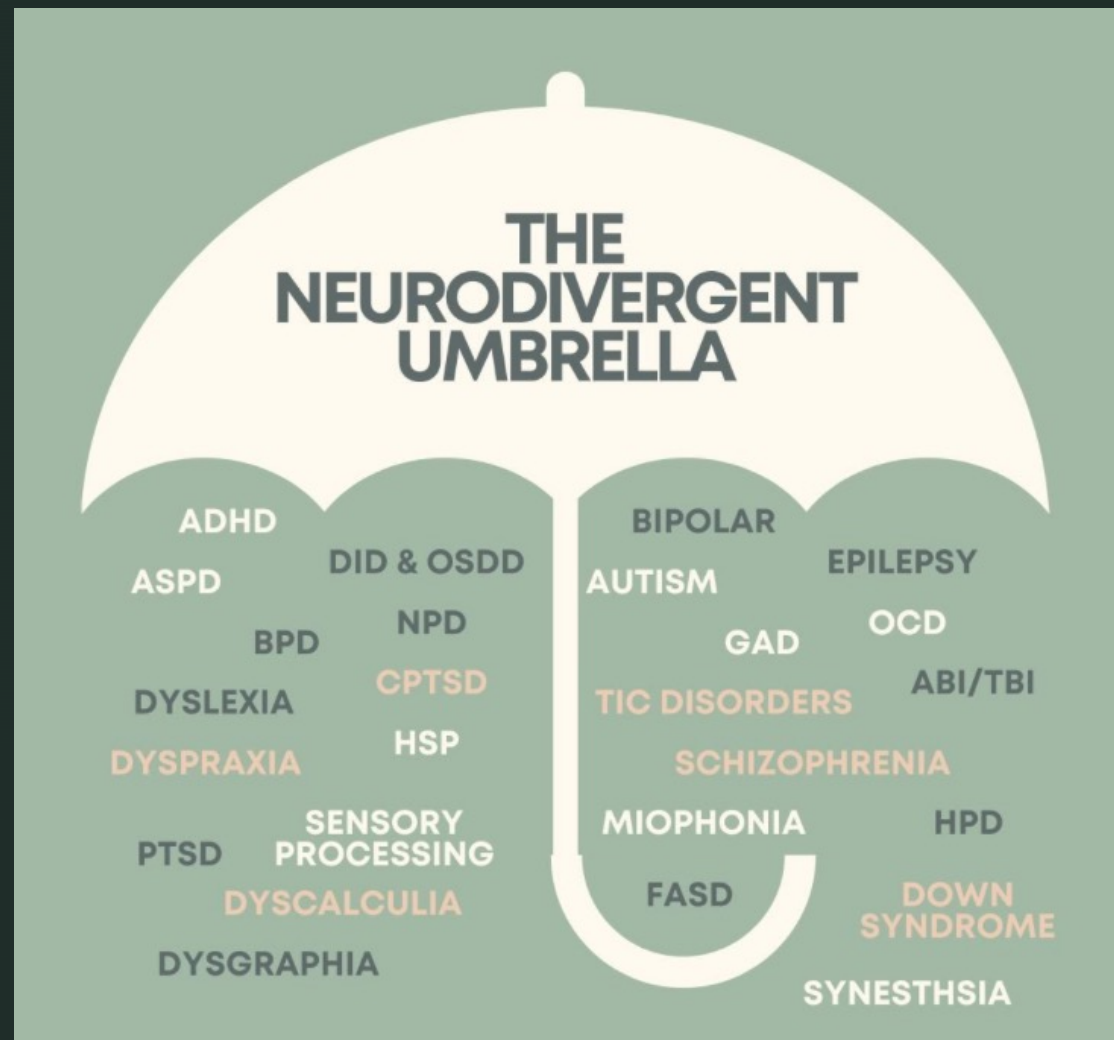
Source:- Fergus Murray (2020) Neurodiversity is for Everyone - chapter 10

<https://autisticrealms.com/product/neurodivergence-bell-curve/>

Spectrum of Neurodivergence

THE SPECTRUM OF NEURODIVERGENCE LOOKS LIKE THIS:





<https://www.peacheycounselling.ca/blog/2024/neurodivergence-adult-adhd-and-mental-health>

The Trickiness of Young Kids

They are always
learning and changing

Developmental norms
are really a range

Even typical
development is atypical

When A Diagnosis Can Be Helpful



CONTACTING SYSTEMS



EXPLANATION AND
UNDERSTANDING



CAN HELP WITH KNOWING
WHAT TO START WITH FOR
INTERVENTION

When to be Consider Further Evaluation



ADHD

Difficulty sitting still (always moving)

Lack of impulse control

Disorganized or gets easily sidetracked

Restlessness

Overly talkative

Difficulty waiting for a turn

Interrupts or blurts out answers

Autism Spectrum Disorders

Difficulty understanding or using non-verbal communication

Playing with toys in unusual ways

VERY fixated areas of interest

Rigid adherence to routines

Hypo or hyper sensory sensitivities

Difficulty with social/emotional reciprocity

Unusual motor or speech patterns

Difficulty in developing and maintaining friendships

Anxiety Disorders

Nervous, restless or tense

Difficulty concentrating

Irritability

Difficulty sleeping

Physiological symptoms

Avoiding things that they typically have not avoided

Struggling to enjoy leisure activities

Difficulty with relationships

Communication Disorders

Not meeting language, speech, or developmental milestones.

Concerns about hearing (not responding to soft sounds, asking for repetition frequently).

Communication not meeting child's needs.

Regression in communication or social skills.

Child seems frustrated by communication.

Unusual speech or voice characteristics (e.g., voice often sounds hoarse, too loud, speech is difficult to understand).

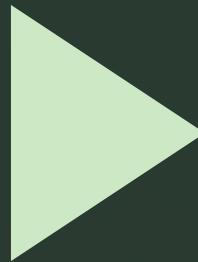
Frequent difficulty getting along with peers.



Overlapping Symptoms



Often co-
occurrence of
more than one
form of
neurodivergence



Not your job as a
parent to know
the label for
what's going on



Where do you start?



Ask a professional
that you trust



Can seek a
diagnosis without
a referral often



Different levels of
intensity of
diagnostic process



Whatcom County Specific



<https://www.seaswhatcom.org>

Social- Emotional/Behavioral Kindergarten Readiness Skills

Understands and
completes 2-step verbal
directions

Takes turns and shares

Can follow rules and
routines

Can independently
complete basic self-care
tasks (putting on coat and
shoes, opening and
closing containers)

Can independently use
the bathroom and wash
hands

Can sit and attend in
group instructional
settings for at least 10-15
minutes

Can independently use
coping skills when
dysregulated

Can recognize and
identify their own
emotions

Respects personal space

Can ask for help when
needed

SPEECH MILESTONES

Produces p, b, d, m, n, h,
w
(2-3Y)

Produces t, k, g, ng, f, y
(3-4Y)

Says all sounds in clusters,
even if some sounds still
produced in error ("spway"
for "spray")
(3-4Y)

**90-100% intelligibility,
even with errors on
later sounds
(4Y)**

Produces v, s, z, sh, ch, j, l
(4-5)

Produces th, zh, r
(5-7 Y)

LANGUAGE MILESTONES

Uses 2-3 word combinations
(2-3Y)

Uses plural -s, -ing & -ed verb endings
(2-3Y)

Asks why and how
(2-3Y)

Uses articles a/the, location words (inside, on, under)
(3-4Y)

Uses 4+ words in sentences
(4+Y)

Sentences have correct word order with fewer grammatical errors
(4-5Y)

Starting to use irregular forms such as *feet* or *men*
(4-5Y)

Uses words to talk about time such as *tomorrow* or *yesterday*
(4-5Y)

Recognizes and names 10 or more letters
(4-5Y)

Imitates reading and writing from left to right
(4-5Y)

SOCIAL/COGNITIVE MILESTONES 2-3 YEARS

Social:

- Engages in simple cooperative play
- **Starts to understand sharing and turn-taking (with help)**
- Expresses a wider range of emotions and empathy
- Uses language to engage others socially

Cognitive:

- **Follows two-step instructions** (“Pick up your toy and put it on the shelf”)
- Identifies familiar objects and people by name
- Expands vocabulary rapidly (“word explosion”)
- **Begins to understand simple concepts like size and quantity** (“big/little,” “more”)

SOCIAL/COGNITIVE MILESTONES 3-4 YEARS

Social:

- Plays cooperatively and enjoys make-believe with peers**
- **Understands social rules (though may not always follow them)**
- Seeks adult approval and affection
- **Begins to take others' perspectives (early theory of mind)****

Cognitive:

- **Can count small numbers and identify some colors/shapes**
- **Understands sequencing (first, next, last)**
- Tells simple stories
- Can solve simple puzzles and complete 3–4 step tasks

SOCIAL/COGNITIVE MILESTONES 4-5 YEARS

Social:

- **Forms friendships and prefers specific playmates**
- **Can cooperate and negotiate in play****
- **Demonstrates empathy and understanding of others' feelings****
- **Understands basic moral concepts (right vs. wrong)**

Cognitive:

- **Uses more complex sentences and storytelling**
- **Understands time concepts (“yesterday,” “tomorrow”)**
- **Engages in imaginative and rule-based play****
- **Begins to plan ahead and think about consequences**