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# Neurodiversity- Informed Coaching:

What is it & Why is it Important?

*Elaine Taylor-Klaus, CPCC, PCC  
& Diane Dempster, MHSA, CPC, PCC*



## In Today's Conversation:

- What is Neurodiversity?
- How Coaching can Underserve Neurodiverse Clients
- What's Important for Coaches to Understand about Neurodiversity
- How to Better Support & When to Refer Neurodiverse Clients



# The Brain does Not Discriminate

- Variation in cognition is normal
- Across the globe, it is a universal human phenomenon that crosses all racial, ethnic, gender, religious and/or socio-economic boundaries
- All people excel in some areas, and struggle in others, depending on their brain



## What is Neurodiversity?

- Neurodiversity is the scientific term that acknowledges everyone's mind is different
- It refers to variations in human brain function, specifically in behavioral traits and cognition
- It is observable in all aspects of life including social, learning, attention, mood and performing tasks



## Neurodiversity Simplified

*“Neurodiversity is the idea that everyone experiences and interacts with the world around them in different ways based on differences in their brains. Variations are not failings or deficits; they’re just... different!”*

*~Jeff Copper, PCC*

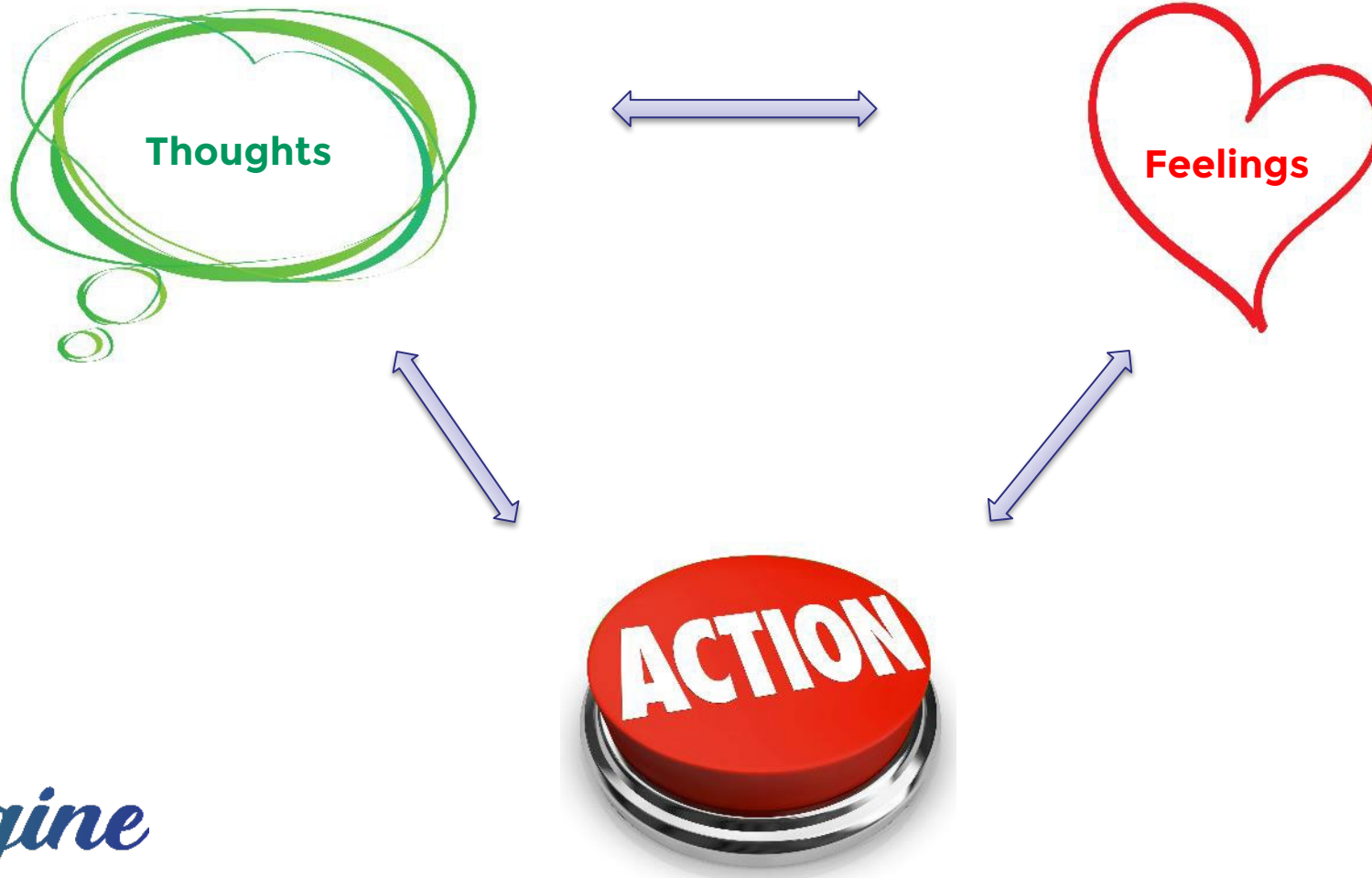
*ICF Neurodiversity Panel, May 2022*



## Neurodiversity by the Numbers:

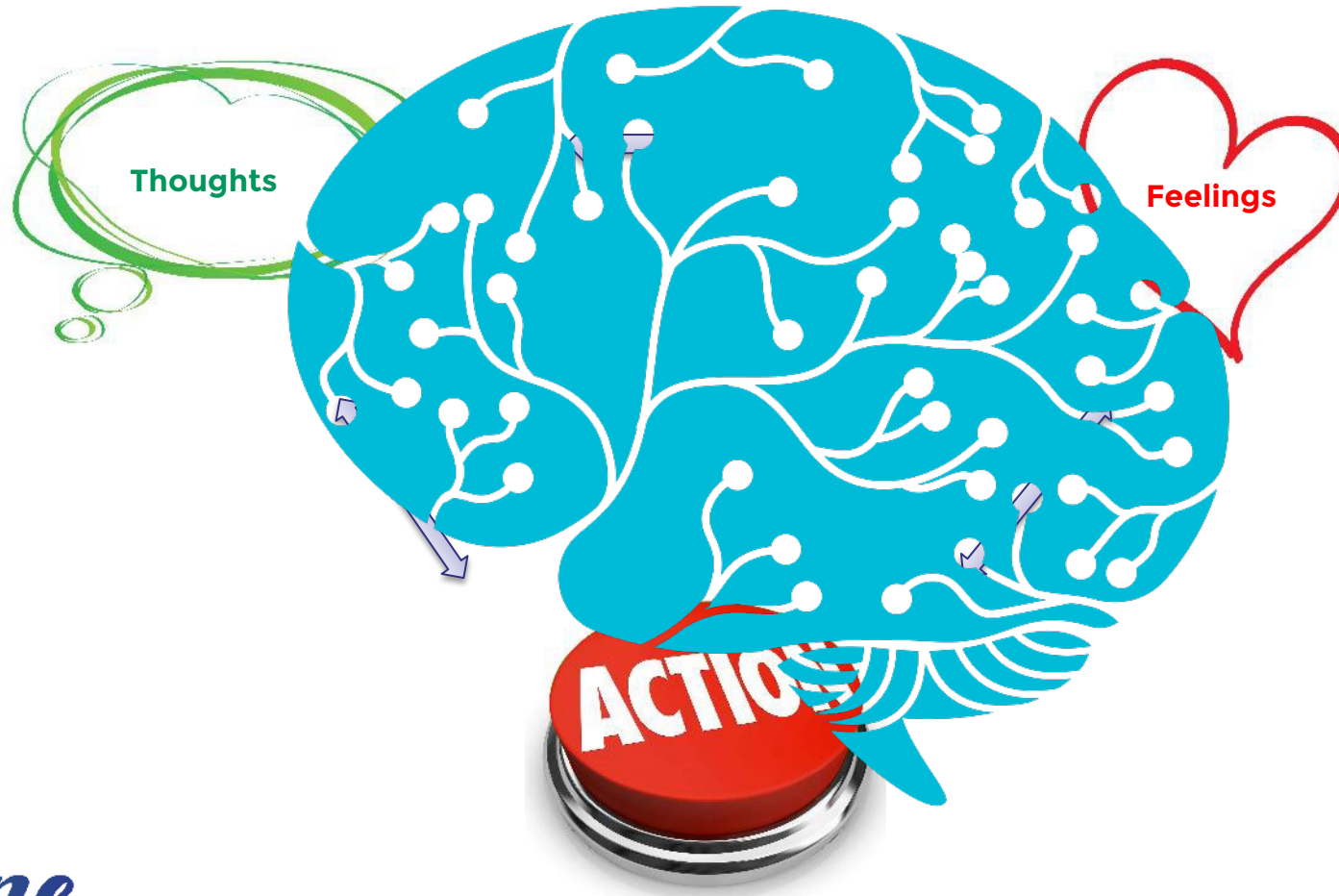
- ~ 41.5% of adults have symptoms of anxiety or depression in 2021 <sup>(1)</sup>
- > 20% of students have learning &/or attention issues <sup>(2)</sup>
- “Between 30% and 40% of the population are thought to be **neurodiverse**. The remaining majority are **neurotypical**.”

# In Coach Training We Learn





# But Information is Processed Differently in a Neurodiverse Brain





## Neurodiversity Can Show Up in Challenges with:

- Disorganization
- Impulsivity (and/or Hyperactivity)
- Memory
- Attention
- Emotional Regulation
- All Kinds of Processing
- Sensory Issues



# Therapeutic Examples of Neurodiversity:

- ADHD/ADD
- Anxiety
- Autism (ASD) (including Asperger Syndrome)
- Giftedness &/or 2E (Twice Exceptional)
- Sensory Processing
- Depression
- Dyslexia/Learning Disabilities
- Trauma/PTSD
- Stressed-out-overwhelmed-(menopausal) human



## Understanding Neurodivergence Improves Coaching Conversations & Client Outcomes

*“Those with neurodivergent conditions are often more at risk of suffering from mental illnesses or poor well-being due to a lack of support, and the stress of 'masking' – acting neurotypically in order to avoid negativity.”*

[healthassured.org](https://healthassured.org)



## When Neurodiversity Isn't Identified in Coaching:

- Coach can mistakenly interpret a client's indecision or lack of follow-through
- Client (or Coach) can create limiting beliefs based on lack of progress in coaching
- Coach may shift into "consultant" role to accommodate challenges
- Coach may not recognize when to ethically refer to a qualified practitioner



# What's Important for Coaches to Understand about Neurodiversity

1. Executive Function
2. Relationship between Motivation & Action
3. How Clients Process Information

# 1) What is Executive Function?



If the Brain was an Orchestra,  
Executive Function would be  
the Conductor

# Executive Function is Responsible for

## Organizing & Directing:

- Thinking
- Feeling
- Acting





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### Task Management Activation

- Planning
- Organizing
- Prioritizing
- Getting started
- Time management
- Sequencing
- Procrastination



### Action Management Action

- Hyperactivity
- Impulse control
- Monitoring
- Self-regulating
- Motor coordination
- Fidgeting
- Handwriting



### Information Management Memory

- Working memory
- Recall
- Forgetfulness
- Issues in Math
- Essay writing
- Learning from mistakes
- Organizing ideas



### Attention Management Focus

- Shifting attention
- Focusing
- Hyper-focus
- Distractibility
- Staying on task
- Handling transition
- Paying attention



### Emotion Management Emotion

- Outbursts
- Intense emotions
- Frustration tolerance
- Oppositional
- Reactive
- Defensiveness
- Shutting down



### Effort Management Energy

- Maintaining energy
- Alertness
- Sustaining effort
- Processing speed
- Completion
- Making decisions
- Looks unmotivated



## EXECUTIVE FUNCTION REFLECTION: Consider previous coaching engagements

When have you encountered clients who ...

- complained of feeling or demonstrated chronic disorganization
- struggled with perfectionism and avoided taking action
- struggled to remember to fulfill commitments
- frequently forgot appointments or were chronically late
- avoided planning and/or struggled with prioritizing, sequencing, and time management
- emotional tendency to over-react or consistently allow emotions or mood to be priority over action



## 2) What's the Role of Motivation?

- **P**lay
- **I**nterest
- **N**ovelty
- **C**ompetition
- **H**urry-up



## MOTIVATION REFLECTION:

Consider previous coaching engagements

When have you encountered clients who ...

- consistently struggled to select a topic for coaching
- (repeatedly) made progress and then abandoned it in favor of starting something new
- seemed committed and then didn't follow through
- failed to hold themselves accountable
- you found yourself frustrated that you weren't able to support them effectively to help them achieve their goals



### 3) Neurodiverse Brains Process Language & Information Differently

- Visual (Spatial)
- Aural (Auditory-musical)
- Verbal (Linguistic)
- Physical (Kinesthetic)
- \* Different Processing Speeds



## PROCESSING REFLECTION:

Consider previous coaching engagements

When have you encountered clients who ...

- consistently struggled to stay on topic and/or would talk for the entire session without focus if you didn't intervene
- seemed to start sharing information in the middle of things
- took a long time to think about and respond to a question and/or frequently ask you to repeat what you've asked
- need to get up and move in order to focus
- tend to avoid some mediums for accessing information
- you found yourself frustrated that you just couldn't understand or follow the way that they think





# Value of Educating Coaches Around Neurodiversity

To meet all clients where they are, coach training should include information about how people process information differently **so that coaches are better prepared to:**

- invite clients to recognize and embrace their own neurodiversity
- ethically determine when they do or don't feel equipped to support neurodiverse clients
- determine when best to refer to or collaborate with other helping professionals, whether they be coaches with neurodiversity expertise, therapists, or others

## To Refer or NOT to Refer?

- If same topic comes up again and again, REFER!
- If you don't feel comfortable or that you're being effective as a coach, REFER!
- If in doubt, Get a MENTOR, Get Training &/or REFER!







# Coaches can Improve ALL Coaching Conversations & Outcomes by Understanding

1. Executive Function
  2. Role of Motivation
  3. How Clients Process Information
- AND ...



## Neurodiversity-Informed Coach Training Includes:

- Education to recognize, understand, and determine whether and how to ethically provide coaching for neurodiverse clients
- Information to better establish and maintain appropriate boundaries with neurodiverse clients – with or without a formal diagnosis
- Tools to work differently with neurodivergent clients, when appropriate ([ImpactParents.com/ICF](https://ImpactParents.com/ICF))
- How to know when and to whom to refer



## What Can You Do Now:

- Get comfortable talking about Neurodiversity
- Incorporate into your initial coaching design
- Transparently explain that you're in the process of learning about neurodiversity
- Ask permission to share observations and raise awareness, if relevant
- Develop partnerships with relevant specialists – both therapists and coaches – for assessment, support, and referrals when appropriate
- Continue your own education on neurodiversity



## Neurodiversity-Informed Coaching Essentials:

- Understand Neurodiversity
- Understand How Coaching can Underserve Neurodiverse Clients
- Explore What's Important for Coaches to Learn about Neurodiversity
- Gain Tools for How to Better Support & When to Refer Neurodiverse Clients



## Disclosures & More Info

- [ImpactParents.com](https://ImpactParents.com)
- *The Essential Guide to Raising Complex Kids with ADHD, Anxiety & More* ([ImpactParents.com/guide](https://ImpactParents.com/guide))
- *Parenting ADHD Now! Easy Intervention Strategies to Empower Kids with ADHD*
- For More Information:

[ImpactParents.com/ICF](https://ImpactParents.com/ICF)

&

[CoachingFederation.org/about/diversity-and-inclusion](https://CoachingFederation.org/about/diversity-and-inclusion)



## Wrap Up

- What did I focus on or pay most attention to today?
- What's my clarity or take-away?
- What is a realistic action step for me to take?
- How can I set myself up for success with this action?

# Neurodiversity-Informed Coaching

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ImpactParents.com*