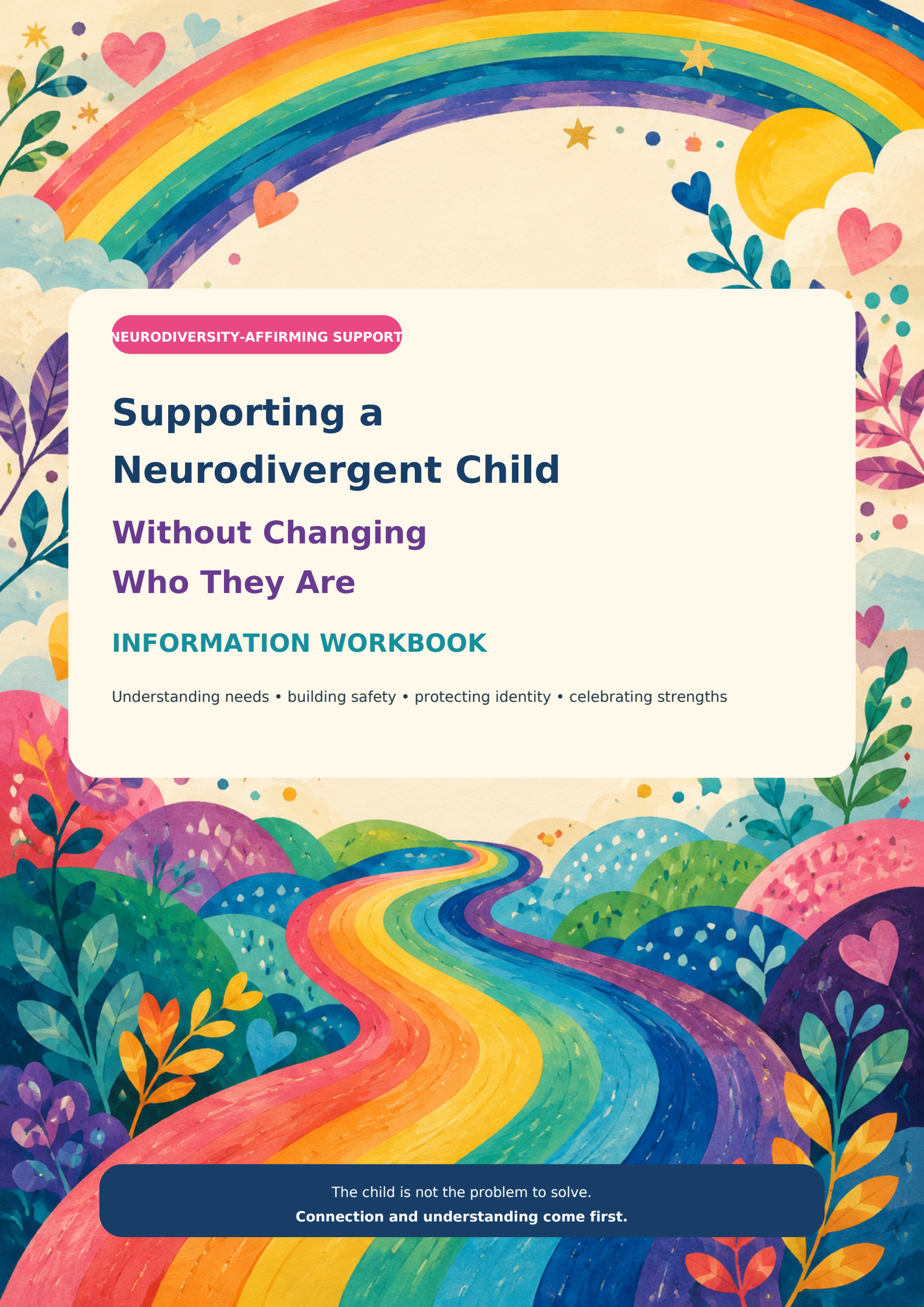




NEURODIVERSITY-AFFIRMING SUPPORT

Supporting a Neurodivergent Child

Without Changing Who They Are

INFORMATION WORKBOOK

Understanding needs • building safety • protecting identity • celebrating strengths

The child is not the problem to solve.
Connection and understanding come first.

2

Start with an affirming lens

Support should increase safety, access, autonomy and belonging - not disguise difference.

The child does not need to become less neurodivergent

Neurodivergence describes natural differences in how a person senses, communicates, learns, focuses, moves and relates. Helpful support asks what the child is experiencing and what the environment needs to change. It does not demand eye contact, stillness, speech, compliance or appearing typical.

What helps this child feel most themselves?

Strengths, interests and joyful connections

Replace judgement with curiosity

Instead of: They are being difficult.

Try asking: What is difficult for them?

Instead of: They will not do it.

Try asking: What makes this inaccessible right now?

The messages I want this child to receive

☐ You belong here.

☐ Your way of communicating matters.

☐ Your needs are real.

☐ You do not have to earn care.

Communication is more than speech

Behaviour, movement, silence, play, gesture and technology can all communicate.

Presume competence and make room for processing

Use clear language, allow extra time and avoid repeating the question rapidly. A child may understand much more than they can express in that moment. Regulation and access to communication often change from day to day.

How this child communicates “yes” or interest

How this child communicates “no” or distress

Communication supports to explore

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Visual choices or objects | ☐ Writing, typing or drawing |
| ☐ AAC or communication device | ☐ One instruction at a time |
| ☐ Previewing changes | ☐ Extra processing time |
| ☐ Low-demand language | ☐ A trusted communication partner |

A phrase I can use when words are difficult

“You do not have to answer straight away. I am here. You can show me another way.”

4

Understand the sensory world

Sensory needs are body needs. Accommodation is support, not a reward.

Look beneath the response

Noise, light, touch, smell, taste, temperature, movement, pain and internal body signals may feel unusually intense, faint or unpredictable. A child may seek sensation, avoid it or need different input at different times.

SOUND

What helps? What overwhelms?

LIGHT & VISUALS

What helps? What overwhelms?

TOUCH & CLOTHING

What helps? What overwhelms?

MOVEMENT & BODY

What helps? What overwhelms?

FOOD & SMELL

What helps? What overwhelms?

SPACE & PEOPLE

What helps? What overwhelms?

My “before it becomes too much” plan

Early signs I can notice:

What I can reduce, offer or change:

Remember

Do not remove a regulating movement, comfort item, quiet space or communication support as a consequence.

Co-regulation before correction

A distressed child needs safety, reduced demand and a steady adult - not a lesson.

Meltdowns and shutdowns are not deliberate misbehaviour

A meltdown is an involuntary response to overwhelm. A shutdown may look quiet, frozen, sleepy, withdrawn or unable to respond. During either, reduce language and demands. Focus on immediate safety, dignity and recovery. Discuss learning only later, if useful.

BEFORE

- ☐ notice early signs
- ☐ offer breaks early
- ☐ make change visible
- ☐ reduce uncertainty
- ☐ protect recovery time

DURING

- ☐ use fewer words
- ☐ lower demands
- ☐ reduce audience
- ☐ allow safe movement
- ☐ stay calm and near

AFTER

- ☐ offer rest and basics
- ☐ avoid shame
- ☐ reconnect gently
- ☐ repair if needed
- ☐ adjust the plan

What helps this child recover?

Words that communicate safety

“You are not in trouble. Your body has had too much. We can make things quieter and wait together.”

6

The child-centred support plan

Build this with the child wherever possible and revisit it as needs change.

What matters to this child?

What helps them feel safe and connected?

Communication and choice

Sensory access and regulation

Adults will change or provide...

Environment • expectations • pace • communication • transitions • recovery time

How we will protect identity and autonomy

☐ We will seek consent and respect “no”.

☐ We will not require masking to access care.

☐ We will value all safe communication.

☐ We will celebrate interests without using them as leverage.

**The aim is not to make the child easier for the world.
It is to make the world safer and more accessible for the child.**