

# A Model of Neurodiversity Affirming Care for Psychologists working with Autistic Adults

Flower, R.L., Benn, R., Bury, S., Camin, M., Muggleton, J., Jellett, R.



## with thanks to:

C.A. Watts	Mrs Amanda Curran	Carly O'Sullivan
Mel Giugni	Victoria Gottliebsen	Dr Erin Bulluss
Anne Pickett	Dr Joanne Lawrence	Ms Monique Mitchelson
Ms Vivien Leung	Mx Georgia Williams	Ms Kathryn Miklosi
Carol Mumme	Dr Bianca Calabria	Miss Becky Roberts
Ms Caitlin Waldie	Catherine Lamont	Haylea Hodges
Alison Nuske	Stephanie B Watts,	

and those on our panel who have chosen to remain anonymous

## Results

The psychologist has a nuanced understanding of Autism, and a commitment to continued learning to deepen their knowledge. This includes learning from resources developed by Autistic people. ①

The psychologist works to provide a space where an Autistic client can feel (physiologically and psychologically) safe to be their true self. ②

The psychologist is self-reflective, open to feedback, sincere, and genuine. This may then help the client feel at ease relating to the psychologist and facilitate developing trust. ③

The psychologist demonstrates that they wholeheartedly believe their Autistic clients. They treat the client as the expert in their own life. ④

The client is supported to reach their own goals and is assisted in advocating for themselves. This involves adapting standard approaches in a way that works for Autistic clients. ⑤

The psychologist works to find a shared way to communicate, recognising differences in communication between individuals and across neurotypes. ⑥

The psychologist is aware and accepting of neurodiversity- that each person has a different brain, and there is no one 'right' brain- each person is unique. They recognise the inequalities faced by Autistic people in their lives. ⑦

## Neurodiversity Affirming Practice - 7 principles-

① A Commitment to Continued Learning about Autism

② Providing Safety to be one's Autistic Self

③ Authenticity and Humility in Practice

④ Validation of Autistic Experiences

⑤ Autistic Informed Person-Centred Support

⑥ Finding a way to Communicate

⑦ Genuine Acceptance and Appreciation of Autism

## The Panel

Autistic Adults who had seen a psychologist in their adult years n = 11

Autistic Psychologists with 2+ years experience providing support to Autistic adult clients n = 12

Psychologists with 2+ years experience providing support to Autistic adult clients n = 5

## Background

Practicing from a neurodiversity affirming framework has gained traction within the psychology profession.

The term 'Neurodiversity Affirming' is used in clinical settings and national guidelines. For example, the national guidelines in Australia (Goodall et al., 2023) indicate practitioners should take a neurodiversity affirming approach, while acknowledging this is not yet well defined.

There is limited evidence-based guidance for professionals wishing to adopt a neurodiversity affirming approach with Autistic clients.

## Aim

Using the Delphi methodology, the aim of this study was to define neurodiversity affirming support in the context of psychologists working with Autistic adult clients.

## Method



### Expression of Interest survey

Recruitment of panelists (Autistic psychologists, Autistic adults, Psychologists with expertise in working with Autistic adults)



### Delphi Round 1 (n = 28)

14 open ended questions - panelists describe Neurodiversity Affirming Care, Reflexive thematic analysis, development of 135 statements (codes)



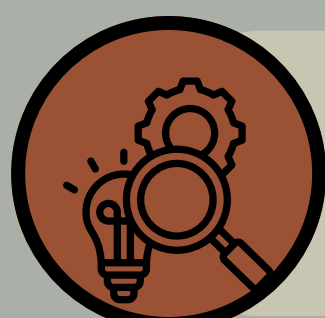
### Delphi Round 2 (n = 23)

Panelists rated 135 statements for consensus, 23 statements removed, 82 retained, development of initial themes



### Delphi Round 3 (n = 24)

Re-rating of 30 statements, feedback on initial themes 8 statements removed, 22 retained. 104 final statements



### Development of 7 principles of neurodiversity affirming support



LA TROBE UNIVERSITY