

Neuro-authentic™ – A Way to Hold More of What Is Human

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Opening

I have strengths and growing edges connected to my neurology. I kept some of those growing edges private because of stigma and a sense that I didn't meet the expectations around me. I believed my whole self was too much, and I quietly betrayed myself to belong. I learned early to code switch in school and social settings. At the time, I didn't know I was autistic. I just knew I didn't fit.

As I got older, I began to make sense of what I had been responding to, even before I had language for it. My adult autism diagnosis confirmed patterns I had already been living and noticing. Across settings, I kept seeing that some ways of participating were recognized and moved things forward. Others were overlooked and did not shape what followed.

When people learn I'm autistic, there is often an assumption that I am socially disconnected or relationally unaware. My experience has been different. The same neurology that is often misunderstood has shaped my high EQ and relational depth. The environments I moved through were not wide enough to hold both. This raises a broader question for me: How many people are limited by assumptions in places meant to support their growth?

The Need for Neuro-authentic™

What I observed was not random. It reflected how social interaction and the environments people create together either nurture participation or constrain it. Neuro-authentic™ addresses that pattern through an integrative and scalable process in which internal wisdom gives rise to attuned connection and co-created belonging, a way of being centered in internal wisdom that supports learning, understanding, connection, protection, expression, reception, and flourishing, both individually and collectively.

The term itself holds this meaning. "Neuro" relates to the nervous system. "Authentic" refers to what is of undisputed origin. Together, Neuro-authentic™ names a way of being that begins within and extends outward, honoring the many ways people experience and engage with the world. The concept and practice of neuro-authentic™ also levels the field, no one is labeled or constrained to being "divergent", "normative" or "typical". We are all neuro-authentic™.

This perspective fosters curiosity, attuned support, and shared understanding across heart-sets, mindsets, environments, and practices, and places responsibility with institutions to build the conditions where all neurotypes can thrive.

Neuro-authentic™ approaches co-create realities shaped by the full diversity of human experience, where people can be, belong, and become as their whole selves.

Universal Design¹ expanded what became possible in physical environments by designing for the full range of human bodies and experiences from the beginning, without the need for adaptation. Neuro-authentic™ extends that same orientation into the social and relational environments people create together.

This matters because the conditions created in social and relational environments shape how participation unfolds, influencing learning, decision-making, culture, and outcomes in every system.

Neuro-authentic™ Principles

Neuro-authentic™ is not about creating something new. It is about participating differently, so a wider range of possibilities, long missed or constrained, can be fully lived.

This is not accommodation language in a softer outfit. The focus is on creating conditions where authentic connection, trust, belonging, and growth can be lived anywhere, not only in protected or exceptional spaces. The work is shifting heart-sets and mindsets so people can co-create better practices and environments where all neurotypes can thrive.

Heart-sets describe how people feel, relate, and orient toward themselves and others, including trust, openness, safety, and care. Mindsets describe how people interpret, make meaning, and decide what is normal, valid, or possible. Together, heart-sets and mindsets shape how people participate, and in turn, how practices and environments are created and sustained.

1. Attune First

Start with what is actually happening. Do not rush to explain, fix, redirect, or move past what is being expressed. There is nothing to cure. There is always more to learn.

- Notice: What is happening here?
- Ask: What am I seeing, hearing, sensing, or missing?
- Check: Did I stay with this long enough to understand it better?

2. Change Begins Within

Shift your own heart-set and mindset first. When people do not have to code switch, mask, brace, or use their energy to fit in, more of that energy remains for learning, connecting, and growing. Shifting how neuro-typical people see, think, and relate opens the way to co-create practices and environments where trust, belonging, and full participation can be lived anywhere.

- Notice: What am I treating as normal, clear, or acceptable because it works for me?
- Ask: What shifts when I change first?
- Check: Does this open the way for trust, belonging, and fuller participation?

¹ Universal Design: design usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without adaptation or specialized design (Ronald L. Mace). Principles developed in 1997 by the Center for Universal Design, North Carolina State University.

3. Center Lived Experience

The people most affected should shape what happens. Not as feedback after the fact, but from the beginning and throughout.

- Notice: Whose experience is shaping this right now?
- Ask: Who is adapting instead of shaping?
- Check: Did anything change because of what people shared?

4. Participate Differently on Purpose

What changes is how people show up. Neuro-authentic™ is active. It asks people to notice pace, tone, expectations, habits, and responses, and to participate differently on purpose.

- Notice: How am I shaping what is happening?
- Ask: What happens when I slow down, listen longer, or respond differently?
- Check: Am I helping widen participation, or narrowing it? Am I, or is the environment or system, discounting or editing anyone? Am I open to surprises and learning?

5. Communication Is More Than Words

Not everything important is said out loud, immediately, or concisely. Meaning can show up in words, silence, movement, repetition, image, gesture, pause, affect, or pattern. What matters is not only what is said, but what is being expressed.

- Notice: How is meaning showing up here?
- Ask: What might be present that is not fully in words yet?
- Check: Did I stay open long enough for more to emerge? Am I witnessing a different way to express and receive inputs? Does this inspire me to try something new?

6. Stay in Partnership

Connection is not separate from what is happening. It is how it happens. Partnership is shaped through how each person shows up moment to moment. The interaction is shaped by what is expressed, how it is met, and how people respond. The goal is to widen the path toward more authentic connections and partnership.

- Notice: What is this person showing right now? What am I showing right now?
- Ask: How is the way I am showing up shaping this interaction? Am I bringing presence, curiosity, steadiness, or am I bringing urgency, assumption, or control?
- Check: Did connection remain present as this unfolded?

7. Stay Connected

Genuine growth dies with force, but thrives where trust, belonging, and connection are nurtured. When people have to use their energy to fit in, brace, or protect themselves, less energy remains for being, belonging, and becoming. This is why the work reaches beyond individual moments and into the ways people live, learn, and relate. Sustainable transformation takes shape when inclusion and belonging can be lived at home, at school, at work, and within ourselves.

- Notice: What is happening between us right now? Are we engaged, or has something shifted, such as silence, tension, withdrawal, over-talking, or going through the motions?
- Ask: What am I bringing that is opening or closing trust, belonging, and participation?
- Check: When I stay with what is showing up, such as a pause, a shift in energy, tension, confusion, or silence, does the interaction become more open, more engaged, or more real? Does the connection remain strong even as the situation is iterating?

Conclusion

Neuro-authentic™ is an entry point to rethink and redesign specific contexts within our society, such as home, school, work, and other co-created social environments, to enable collective flourishing and widen the path for authentic connection, partnership, and more of what is human in each of us.

When people build the capacity to notice themselves, stay in genuine relationship with others, and make meaning together they can create the conditions for systems to evolve in ways that support and nurture all people.

Grounded in my experience across early childhood learning, pediatric community spaces, and organizational systems, neuro-authentic™ calls for shifts in heart-sets and mindsets to co-create better practices and environments where all neurotypes can thrive. When heart-sets and mindsets shift and show up in daily practice, through how people notice, respond, communicate, and stay in relationship with one another, the environments built together become more open, responsive, and able to sustain a wider range of human experience. Like Universal Design, which expands what is possible by designing for the full range of human experience from the beginning, this approach benefits everyone. It creates conditions that are more connected, functional, and supportive of growth, safety, and shared flourishing.