

PE2141/B: Support the neurodiverse community by providing funding for psychoeducation

Petitioner written submission, 1 May 2025

Introduction

Psychoeducation for neurodiversity educates individuals, families, and communities about neurodevelopmental conditions like autism, ADHD, and dyslexia, promoting acceptance and effective support. It provides insights into unique cognitive and behavioural traits, fostering self-advocacy and reducing stigma. Delivered through workshops or individual sessions, it emphasises strengths-based strategies and accommodations to enhance daily functioning and well-being. Research underscores its role in improving self-esteem and social inclusion for neurodivergent individuals¹. By embracing neurodiversity, psychoeducation empowers individuals to thrive, celebrating differences and supporting equitable opportunities.

Importance of psychoeducation

Psychoeducation plays a critical role in supporting neurodiverse individuals by fostering understanding, self-acceptance, and effective coping strategies for conditions such as autism, ADHD, and dyslexia. It equips individuals, families, and communities with knowledge about neurodiverse traits, reducing stigma and promoting inclusion. By providing evidence-based information on strengths, challenges, and accommodations, psychoeducation empowers neurodiverse individuals to navigate social, educational, and professional environments more effectively. For instance, understanding sensory sensitivities or executive functioning differences can lead to tailored interventions that enhance quality of life. Research highlights its efficacy: a 2019 study by Gordon et al. in 'Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders' found that psychoeducation improved family communication and reduced stress in households with autistic children². Similarly, Barkley's 2013 work on ADHD emphasizes psychoeducation's role in improving self-regulation and adherence to treatment plans³. By bridging knowledge gaps, psychoeducation fosters a more inclusive society that values neurodiversity.

Importance of lived experience

The development and delivery of psychoeducational programs by individuals with lived experience of neurodiversity, such as those who are autistic or otherwise neurodivergent, are critical for fostering authentic, empowering, and equitable support systems that resonate with the communities they serve. When individuals with firsthand experience lead these programs, they bring an unparalleled depth of understanding to the unique challenges, strengths, and perspectives of neurodivergent individuals, ensuring that content is not only accurate but also

¹ Happé, F., & Frith, U. (2020). Annual Research Review: Looking back to look forward – changes in the concept of autism and implications for future research. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, and Allied Disciplines*, 61(3), 218–232. Doi: 10.1111/jcpp.13176

² Gordon, K., et al. (2019). Psychoeducation for families of children with autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 49(5), 1901-1912.

³ Barkley, R. A. (2013). *Taking Charge of ADHD: The Complete, Authoritative Guide for Parents*. Guilford Press.

culturally and emotionally relevant. This authenticity helps dismantle stereotypes and deficit-based narratives often perpetuated by traditional, clinician-led models, replacing them with strengths-based approaches that celebrate neurodiversity and promote positive self-identity. For instance, lived experience informs the creation of tools and strategies that reflect real-world needs, such as sensory-friendly communication methods or practical coping mechanisms for navigating social stigma, as highlighted in works like Crane et al. (2019), which emphasize the need for autism-aware support⁴. Moreover, involving neurodivergent individuals in program design and facilitation fosters trust and engagement, as participants see their experiences mirrored and validated, enhancing the programs' impact on mental health and self-efficacy. This participatory approach, endorsed by Happé & Frith (2020), aligns with the neurodiversity paradigm's call for co-produced knowledge, ensuring that psychoeducation not only educates but also empowers individuals to thrive by advocating for their own needs and fostering inclusive environments. By centring lived experience, these programs challenge systemic inequities in mental health and educational services, creating pathways for meaningful societal change and equitable opportunities for all neurodivergent individuals.

The role of sensory aids

Sensory aids, such as noise-cancelling headphones, weighted blankets, and fidget tools, play a pivotal role in fostering social inclusion for neurodivergent individuals, particularly those with autism or sensory processing differences, by mitigating sensory overload and enabling participation in public and social environments. In Scotland, where the Scottish Government has committed to promoting equality and inclusion through policies like the Scottish Strategy for Autism, providing these aids is a practical step towards ensuring neurodivergent individuals can engage fully in community life. Sensory overload, as highlighted in research like Crane et al. (2019), can lead to anxiety and social withdrawal, excluding individuals from education, employment, and social activities. By supplying sensory aids, the Scottish Government could empower individuals to navigate challenging environments—such as busy classrooms, workplaces, or public transport—thus reducing barriers to inclusion. For instance, noise-cancelling headphones can enable an autistic person to attend a community event without distress, while weighted vests can provide calming sensory input during stressful social interactions. Funding these aids aligns with the neurodiversity paradigm, as discussed by Happé & Frith (2020), which advocates for environmental adjustments over deficit-focused interventions. The Scottish Government should prioritise subsidising or distributing sensory aids through existing frameworks, such as the NHS or local authorities, to ensure equitable access, particularly for low-income families. Additionally, integrating sensory aid provision with psychoeducational programmes led by neurodivergent individuals could enhance their effectiveness, ensuring aids are tailored to lived experiences. By investing in sensory aids, the Scottish Government would demonstrate a commitment to tangible, inclusive solutions that celebrate neurodiversity, reduce social exclusion, and uphold the rights of all Scots to participate fully in society.

⁴ Crane, L., Adams, F., Harper, G., Welch, J., & Pellicano, E. (2019). "Something needs to change": Mental health experiences of young autistic adults in England. *Autism*, 23(2), 477–493. Doi: 10.1177/1362361318757048

Conclusion

In conclusion, combining psychoeducational programmes led by neurodivergent individuals with sensory aids, like noise-cancelling headphones, fosters social inclusion in Scotland. Psychoeducation, rooted in neurodiversity principles (Happé & Frith, 2020), promotes self-acceptance and reduces stigma, while sensory aids mitigate overload, enabling participation (Crane et al., 2019). By funding these initiatives, the Scottish Government can ensure equitable access, dismantle barriers, and empower neurodivergent individuals to thrive in an inclusive society.