

Neurodiverse Adventures: Self-Advocacy Handout - Understanding Your Needs

As a neurodivergent or autistic individual, it's important to understand and identify your unique needs across various areas of life. Recognising and acknowledging these needs helps you advocate for yourself, improve your well-being, and access the support you require. This handout will explore six categories of needs: physical, emotional, spiritual, practical, learning, and social.

1. Physical Needs

These are the needs related to your body and sensory experiences. They focus on ensuring that your physical health and environment support your well-being.

Examples:

- Access to sensory-friendly spaces or quiet areas
- Adequate sleep and rest
- Nutritional needs (e.g., food preferences or sensitivities)
- Exercise or movement (e.g., stretching, walking)
- Medical care or support (e.g., medication, therapy)

Questions to Reflect On:

- Do you have any sensory sensitivities that require adjustments in your environment (e.g., noise, lighting)?
- Are there any physical activities that help you manage stress or improve your mood?
- Do you have any ongoing physical health needs that require regular attention?

2. Emotional Needs

These needs are related to your emotional well-being, including how you process and express emotions.

Examples:

- Emotional support from friends, family, or professionals
- Understanding and validation of your feelings
- Space to process emotions without pressure
- Comfort during times of distress (e.g., self-soothing strategies)

Questions to Reflect On:

- How do you like to express your emotions? Do you need specific support when feeling overwhelmed?
- Are there particular situations that trigger emotional distress, and what can help in those moments?
- Do you have strategies that help you manage your emotions (e.g., deep breathing, talking to a friend)?

3. Spiritual Needs

Spiritual needs are about connecting to a sense of purpose, meaning, or personal beliefs. This can include religious, philosophical, or personal practices.

Examples:

- Time for personal reflection or meditation
- Connection with nature or a higher power
- Engagement in spiritual practices, such as prayer or mindfulness
- A sense of community or belonging related to shared beliefs

Questions to Reflect On:

- Do you feel a need to connect with something larger than yourself (e.g., a spiritual practice, nature)?
- How do you find meaning or purpose in life?
- Are there specific rituals or practices that help you feel grounded or connected?

4. Practical Needs

These needs refer to day-to-day tasks and organisational support that help manage life more effectively and reduce stress.

Examples:

- Assistance with household tasks (e.g., cleaning, cooking)
- Time management or organisational support
- Financial management or budgeting assistance
- Access to transportation or mobility support

Questions to Reflect On:

- Are there any practical tasks that you find overwhelming or need help with regularly?
- What tools or support systems (e.g., apps, calendars, reminders) help you stay organised?
- Is there a need for assistance with personal care or running errands?

5. Learning Needs

Learning needs focus on how you acquire, process, and retain information. This can include formal education, work or other types of learning experiences.

Examples:

- Accommodations for learning environments (e.g., extended time, alternative formats)
- Clear instructions or visual aids to support understanding
- The need for a quieter space to focus, work/study/regulate
- Specific learning styles (e.g., hands-on, visual, auditory)

Questions to Reflect On:

- Do you prefer certain types of learning (e.g., visual, auditory, hands-on)?
- Are there any accommodations that help you learn more effectively (e.g., extra time, one-on-one instruction, software or equipment)?
- What challenges do you face when trying to learn something new, and how can they be addressed?

6. Social Needs

Social needs relate to your desire for connection, interaction, and the ability to navigate social situations comfortably.

Examples:

- A need for regular social interaction, even if limited
- Desire for meaningful friendships or social support networks
- Clear social boundaries and expectations
- Space to recharge after socialising

Questions to Reflect On:

- How much social interaction do you need to feel fulfilled? Do you prefer smaller groups or one-on-one time?
- Are there social situations that you find draining or overwhelming? How do you manage them?
- What kind of support or accommodations would help you navigate social situations more comfortably?

Reflection Exercise: Identifying Your Needs

Take a few minutes to reflect on the following questions and note your thoughts:

1. What needs do you feel are most urgent for you right now in each category?
2. Are there any areas where you feel particularly unsupported or where adjustments could make a big difference in your life?

3. What steps can you take to advocate for these needs in your daily life (work, home, relationships, etc.)?

Closing Thoughts

Self-advocacy starts with understanding your own needs. By identifying and articulating these needs, you can take the necessary steps to ensure that you're supported and empowered in all aspects of your life. Remember, self-advocacy is about asking for what you need and finding the right resources and support to help you thrive. It's ok to ask for help to navigate your needs.