

**FLO Friday: Neurodiversity in Post-Secondary Education – Supporting Students**  
**BCcampus webinar hosted on October 4, 2024**  
**Facilitator: Jenine Lillian**  
**Host: Helena Prins**

HELENA PRINS:

Good morning, everyone, and welcome. My name is Helena Prins. Many of you know me, but I also see many new names in the list there. I'm so excited that you chose to join us today for this FLO Friday. I'm an advisor on the BCcampus Learning and Teaching Team, and it's my fun and, I think, fabulous job. I love it to coordinate the family of FLO courses, and I get to know all of you and work fantastic facilitators. I am zooming in today from the unceded traditional territories of the Lekwungen people, who include the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations. October marks, for me, 16 years since I came to this beautiful island. I'm so thankful for the privilege to live and work on these beautiful lands. Before I hand the session over, just a couple of things. You may have noticed we are recording the session. Here you've been invited to turn off your camera, and please do so specifically if you did not give consent to be recorded. You also have the option to rename yourself to FLO Participant. The recording, as well as all the slides will be shared with all registrants hopefully in the coming week. I hope that you will stay with us till the very end because we have a survey for you to complete, and as I always say, we do read your responses and we really value your input. I also just want to then announce at the end some of the upcoming events. If you stay till the end, I'll let you know some of the things coming up that will be fun and meaningful to you as well.

Now, please allow me to introduce your FLO facilitator for today. Jenine Lillian is a neurodivergent consultant, educator, artist, writer, and librarian. Jenine, I'm so thankful to you for being here and for leading us in this one hour on Neurodiversity in Post-Secondary Education: Supporting Students. Over to you.

JENINE LILLIAN:

Thank you so much. Thank you, Helena and Paula for your behind the scenes and contemplative moments we had before the webinar started. And welcome to all of you. I cannot see you at this moment, but you are in my heart, and I am very excited to talk with you today and learn from you today, and to hopefully give you at least three things that you didn't know at this moment by the last moment we share on this webinar today. I'm very, very honoured to be asked to present by BCcampus, and I am zooming in from Nelson, British Columbia. Helena is graciously keeping track of any questions that might appear in the chat. So please don't feel that you have to hold your questions at the front of your mind until the very end when we do a very lively Q&A session. You will not be interrupting me in any way. If you type a question right this second as an example, and then Helena is going to grab those. Then we'll have a moment where I'll invite you also to either chat or unmute and speak out your response to a question I pose in a little while.

Hello. I'm Jenine. I'm autistic. Both of these sentences have been true my entire life. However, the second sentence is one that I've only been saying since February of this year. I just turned 52 last week. And after a long and challenging journey in two countries, the US and Canada, I'm a dual citizen. I finally obtained a formal diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder in February of this year, and took that journey and need for further information and resources support and positivity for adults that I struggled with myself, as a call to action to start my business as a neurodiversity consultant. So I'm very honoured to be here today and to show you an example of an autistic person who, quote unquote, "does not look autistic," which was part of my challenge and remains so to this day.

One of the things that everyone should know that I didn't know when I was learning about myself and others is that "If you've met one person with autism, you've met one person with autism." This quote by Steven Shore doesn't have a typo in it. It really is that different and that unique. So you may know other people who are autistic, and they and I present totally differently. This, by the way, is a persona that I can step into and I require to step out of when I'm not presenting and teaching. So it was part of why I wanted to have us all take some time for ourselves at the beginning. It's not just for me. It helps us all.

So I want to start by talking about how we are all the same. You're not alone, you are loved and you love. Your authentic self longs to be seen, heard, and valued. And you have your own dreams, fears, desires, strengths, weaknesses, sensitivities, goals, learning style, perspective, and unique contribution to make wherever you go.

And we are all different. You have preferences for physical, emotional and mental stimulation. You have special interests, hobbies, skills, and abilities. You have ways of expressing your thoughts and feelings. You enjoy being recognized, included, and appreciated in certain ways, and you have your own dreams, fears, desires, strengths, weaknesses, sensitivities, goals, learning style, perspective, and unique contribution to make wherever you go.

Whether you're attending today as a parent or a teacher as a student or a curious onlooker, regardless of your current status, it's true for all people, the same that we are all different and we are all the same that "We see the world not as it is, but as we are or as we are conditioned to see it." This quote is from Stephen R Covey.

We're going to cover five important things for today. 1. is definitions, what neurodiversity is, and what it's not. 2. How neurodiversity looks, how it shows up in life and at work, and at school. 3. Why neurodiversity matters, emerging discoveries and stories of experiences. 4. How to support neurodivergent students, increasing awareness and reducing stigma, and 5. What you are wondering about. We're going to have questions, resources, and connections. Again, please do not hesitate to put your question in the chat at any time throughout this presentation, and/or to email me afterwards.

Neurodiversity key terms. You may have noticed that the word "neurodiversity" has been popping up a lot more often, just like the word "anxiety" and the word "overwhelmed" has also been popping up a lot more often. It's an indicator of the current status of our society, and I'm really excited about the fact that this word and these ideas are coming into more view so that we can have more conversations about them. Basically, neurodiversity is part of the natural and very beneficial concept of biodiversity. Every single human brain is different and regardless of who you are and how you present and how you process things and how we are all the same and how we're all different. Regardless of that, we are all neurodiverse. Humanity is neurodiverse because we are different and unique from each other. There's no one on Earth who has the same brain as me, and that can be sad and that can be wonderful. Neurodivergent, otherwise called ND, describes an individual with cognitive differences. For example, I am autistic, I am neurodivergent. Neurotypical, sometimes denoted as NT, describes someone who fits into the mainstream society, who matches the norm, and our world is designed with a very heavy neurotypical bias. Just a side note on words because language does matter. I do not love these terms. I do not walk around and say, you're neurodivergent, you're neurotypical. I walk around and say, "I'm Jenine. What's your name?" It's important to note that even though we are educating ourselves and others about these differences and similarities and helping to raise that awareness, we also want to make sure that we're not producing any unintentional stigma or negativity that might go with it.

Nick Walker is a professor and writer about neurodiversity, and he's also neurodivergent himself. "Neurodiversity is a natural, healthy, and important form of human biodiversity, a fundamental and vital characteristic of the human species, a crucial source of evolutionary and creative potential."

A lot of you might be thinking, I keep hearing neurodiversity and neurodivergent, but I don't really know what that means or for a long time, neurodiversity, the word equaled autistic, and that is barely a snapshot. Basically, an estimated 1 and 5 adults and this estimate is low. Why? Because of the barriers to being believed, of which I am an example with lived experience, because of the barriers to actually getting formal assessments, again, and because of the discrepancy between how it shows up between individuals, between generations, and among different groups such as women, LGBTQIA, or the BIPOC community. As we know, our medical systems have had many barriers to service and to equity. We're starting to see the shift and it's taking all of our efforts. I'm very glad that you're here today. You may have heard of these conditions and you likely know someone with one or more of these conditions. These conditions include but are not limited to, ADHD, ADD, autism spectrum disorder, which is called a spectrum because it presents differently across every single human being, not because it's like the gender spectrum where you're somewhere on it. Bipolar disorder, dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, epilepsy, obsessive compulsive disorder, and Tourette syndrome. A number of people who are neurodivergent have multiple conditions, which I don't love that word either, but it's what we have at the moment. For example, when I was diagnosed at 51 with autism spectrum disorder or ASD, I was also diagnosed with dyslexia. You may imagine how difficult it was for me to go through my entire schooling, including my bachelor's and my

master's degree. It's no surprise that I'm a librarian who doesn't like to read. So there's no point in me getting interventions and support and accommodations for dyslexia now because my brain has already done a bunch of things to bolster my experience. So when you're working with post-secondary students, a lot of what we can do is let them know. "It seems to me you might be struggling with this. Did you know these resources are available? Did you know that I know something about that, or I know someone who can talk with you more about it or help you find information?" If you happen to be surprised by anything that's on this list or that's not on this list, please feel free to add that to the chat and we'll incorporate it in our Q&A at the end. Another thing I want to mention about neurodiversity and anyone who has any of these items on this list is that Neurodivergent folks have an increased amount of stress and anxiety. Also, because this is lifelong, and part of the way our brains work, we end up with both anxiety and depression. You can't have in the long term depression without anxiety, and you can't have in the long term anxiety without depression. Right away, you can imagine if someone was to say to you, if your clinician and trusted medical advisor was to say to you, "This is what I think is going on for you." You may well not feel great getting that information. You may well not feel like saying, I'm neurodivergent, or I'm going to let my employer know, or I'm going to let my parents know, or I'm going to let my partner and family know. You may not know these things, and you may not feel when you find them out, that they're positive.

So how neurodiversity shows up. This is in life, school, and work, masking is the number one. As I mentioned, I'm currently operating from a persona. I'm currently camouflaging and mimicking and working with scripts like my slides and masking. This is not my normal MO. I don't speak at this level. I don't project a lot of confidence and authority normally, I'm much more casual and much more introverted. However, we all need to step into this persona, especially if we're educators. That doesn't mean that that's how we live every moment of our life when we get to decide. Neurodiversity, also, everybody does that, by the way. The neurodiversity, we have to do it more often to fit in or get by or function. We also show up with anxiety, with sensory sensitivities, learning differences, atypical communication styles, difficulty with time management, and desire for a consistent schedule or routine. We have a holiday coming up soon, and you might think of this in terms of, well, I don't know if everybody masks. Think about when you're sitting at the table and you're confronted with folks that you love, and you want to celebrate this holiday and someone has a very different political opinion from you or a very different idea about vaccinations, or a very different learning style, communication style. We often, as part of a social machine, the lubricant of that machine requires us not to be our whole self, not to say what we're really thinking or not to share or overshare our persona, our perspective, right? So that's why we get to sort of let down our guard with our circle of care. And those folks know us really well. However, you can imagine also that if you spend your entire life consciously and unconsciously covering up and contorting who you actually are, it's going to have some fall out along the way. And this is absolutely the case for folks who have any of those conditions that I mentioned. Because you're working primarily with students who are say 18 to 25-year-old. This is also the case for older students, but especially the case for this group. Your common manifestations of neurodiversity in young adult students include differences in attention and focus, unique social interaction styles, sensory processing

sensitivities, varied executive functioning abilities, alternative learning and information processing styles, and heightened creativity and problem-solving skills in specific areas. For example, I have a lot of sensory processing sensitivities, and I have a difficult time when there are a lot of smells and bright lights and sounds. I cannot, for example, read in public or sleep on a plane. I have too much sensory input in order to fully relax physiologically in that environment. Also, the "executive functioning" term has been gaining some traction and popularity as well, so you might have heard about that. This comes into play with scheduling with starting, not starting. For example, any one of you who spent your entire education burning the midnight oil to cram for a test the night before or write a paper the night before. I'm going to say that you may have encountered this issue. Procrastination is not at all about laziness. It is about perfectionism, and it is a failure to start because as soon as we start something, we gain momentum, and that helps us continue. But if we don't start, it can be debilitating, and of course, that's going to affect anyone who has a deliverable of any kind.

One of the things I wanted to talk with you about today was how this idea or this very real situation, I should say, of having to take who you are that you cannot change, and you may not even realize you're different. You just know something's not translating, something's not working. And then having to shift and morph and hide and bend right to this different other version of you just to get through the day. "Artists are the ultimate square pegs, and the problem with pounding a square peg into a round hole is not that the hammering is hard work. It's that you're destroying the peg." This quote by Paul Collins makes me tear up every time I see it because I have often been pounded into a round hole. As I mentioned, I'm now 52, and I didn't know throughout the entirety of my schooling of all types. Through my relationships and my work history and my education, all of this, plus just my general quality of life. Can you imagine how beneficial that information would have been, even if it came with that sort of sting of the acidity of the stigma and the steep climb. It's an interesting idea to consider, for example, you can imagine that you or someone you love is in this situation. Maybe you could say, you or someone you love, you can imagine that they really needed glasses. They didn't know that they needed glasses and they didn't have access to glasses. But they just kept having issue after issue after issue with safety, with productivity, with social situations, with being able to organize information or move through their daily lives. And then if they are given the information, it looks like you need glasses, and then somebody says, Let's get you some glasses. Let's make sure they work and make sure they fit, so they're not the wrong glasses because that can cause a whole other problem, which is also one of the things that occurs quite a lot in neurodivergent diagnoses. Then the immense relief and feeling of superpower that may come from having that support.

So for those of you who are teaching in post-secondary settings, I want you to especially take note of this abstract quote. And this is from an article that's included in your resource packet, which you'll be receiving along with the recording. So the challenges faced by neurodivergent individuals are not only related to the disability functional differences, and maybe the accommodation needs, but also to stigma and prejudice toward neurodivergent people. Then consequently, we are less successful than our neurotypical peers, and then marginalized

groups, of course, have even greater inequities. It is a very complex problem that we're not going to be able to solve today. However, that doesn't mean we can't do something about this today.

So the importance of neurodiversity awareness in post-secondary settings includes inclusive education, improved academic outcomes, preparation for a diverse workforce, innovation and creativity, and mental health and well-being. Inclusive education, I know a lot of you have been learning about and utilizing universal design. I just want to say that whether you're in an education setting or a work setting or a life setting, anytime that we elevate the experience for a neurodivergent individual, we elevate that experience for everyone. So it's human design, which is autistic friendly, which is ADHD friendly, which is OCD friendly. You can see how whichever of these that you're most concerned with or yourself or someone you love is dealing with, we support everyone when we start to support and include neurodiversity. Improved academic outcomes. Imagine if you were able to, as an instructor, do a very simple thing such as checking in with your students to find out if they have started a project that's due in eight weeks, rather than let it be on them and assume that they're doing what you say they should be doing. You can immediately impact that starting and momentum cycle and disrupt the procrastination, perfection, and anxiety-ridden cycle that they've become accustomed to. Preparation for a diverse workforce. All of the studies that are being done right now are about the work environment. So it's really important to note though that especially the younger generations care more and are choosing their employers more based on their equity, diversity, and inclusion. They're also identifying more as neurodivergent than ever before. And innovation and creativity. To me, I don't think outside the box. There is no box. I have tons and tons of ideas, and I'm an artist in a lot of different media, and I had my whole life people telling me, you're so creative, you're so creative, you're so creative. I just thought that that was how it is for everyone. If you or someone you love that you're thinking of is crazy innovative and really good at coming up with stuff, that lenses, ways that people don't see things typically, or they're just massively creative. There's a real high chance that they're neurodivergent and to me, that is the seat of my resourcefulness, my creativity, and my problem-solving. Which is not to say that it doesn't cause me some problems. I don't want to sugar coat that. Mental health and well-being, not just the acceptance, but also the self-care, reducing stress, reducing anxiety, and that holistic support. I hope you noticed when you first came in, it was incredibly quiet. The slide that welcomed you was an invitation from me, which had nothing to do with housekeeping. It was inviting you to take a moment for yourself, to transition to this, from that, and to set the tone. Also, my slide design, you may notice is quite quiet compared to the normal, average, typical delivery. All of the things I'm doing today are not just to impart some information to you, but also to model to you what it could be like to prompt in you a feeling of this is different. Why is it different? What is different about it? Maybe this is something I can implement, or maybe I can benefit from it, or maybe my students might. It's all quite intentional and I'm so glad you're here.

Language matters, and depending on what sources you're citing for your research, you're going to get different language. Soon, hopefully, we'll just all be human beings. But for now, we're

looking at "neurodivergent" and "neurotypical," which I really don't like. Another one I came across was a "specific learning disability," otherwise known as an SLD. This would include dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia. So the ability to read, write, and do math in an effort-free way. For me, for example, reading is an excruciatingly effortful process. I do it and I can do it quite quickly, but I would much prefer to listen to audiobooks or have the ability to share with you my content, my educational products, in an audio -visual manner rather than writing. So 94% of students with specific learning disabilities, which are again, dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, which are also neurodivergent conditions, received accommodations in their K through 12 education, but only 17% receive them in post-secondary education. This is that special moment I forecasted where you can unmute and just call out. Why do you think this is the case? And Helena is going to keep track of those that are the answers that are in the chat. So please feel free to unmute and say why you think that's the case. There are no wrong answers.

PARTICIPANT: Traditional funding models. Funding models.

JENINE: Thank you. What else? Don't be shy.

PARTICIPANT: Wait lists.

JENINE: Wait lists for what?

PARTICIPANT:

To get a cap accommodation, like so for psycho-educational assessment.

JENINE: Thank you. What else?

PARTICIPANT:

Internalized stigmas and not asking for help. Yes. An assumption that universities are for the elite.

JENINE:

Well said. Remember 94% of these students received accommodations in their K–12 education, but those same students, only 17% received them in post-secondary education. What's going on?

HELENA:

There's a few from the chat. Let me read them. They're moving fast over my screen here. Some said, "Did not know where or how to get accommodations about masking," "Not knowing you have these disabilities." Yes. "The onus is on the individual to find support as opposed to parent support." "Parents advocate for kids from K–12, but not on post-secondary." who said that.

JENINE: Thank you whoever said that. That's a big one. What else? Any others at all?

HELENA:

Yeah. There's quite a few, "Systemic barriers that require up-to-date and formal documentation. The process of requesting accommodations, that's not clear. Students don't know that accommodations are available, financial barriers," et cetera, quite a few about costs coming up high, cost of assessment. Yes.

JENINE:

Wonderful. Thank you so much. And thank you, Helena for being my eyes on the chat. Okay. Yes. All of these are true. Another issue that you may not know about that I only just learned about myself through a friend who told me about their experience in their family is that, especially in some communities, for example, the Kootenays, it may well be possible for your son or daughter to receive accommodations for a self-diagnosed learning disability, aka neurodivergent condition. For example, if your child is struggling in K–12 education, and you talk with the instructors and they are sympathetic and understanding, they may well give your student additional time for their assignments and or a different testing environment so that they can succeed in the deliverables and the time frames and the benchmarks that the teachers have on them to deliver those. You have this very rigid. However, you cannot get an accommodation in post-secondary education without a formal diagnosis of a disability, which includes learning disabilities, which are also included in that larger list of neurodivergent conditions. For example, if you're 14 and you've done your research and talked with your parents and your parents are incredibly loving and supportive, and we all decided, these folks, that you have autism, you can go forward and share that information with the folks who really have impact on your life, and it may well work that you can have those supports. But once you get into college, you are not able to get any accommodations in what we'll call an informal way. So there are a lot of folks who are self-diagnosing and some of them, they are self-diagnosing incorrectly because we're not medical professionals. I'm not a clinician. I didn't know, even if I would have taken lots of online tests. I probably wouldn't have said that I was autistic because I'm female and all the research has been very biased toward the male and younger male experience. We're just now uncovering this. But the other piece of it is, even if you are legitimately blind, dyslexic, let's say, and you're self-diagnosed, for a variety of reasons, which include a 1- to 3-year wait time to get the formal assessment, a 3 to \$5,000 cost to get the formal assessment, and/or just not even knowing or having your parents believe you or your partner believe you, so you don't pursue it, as was mentioned. Some of these things were mentioned. So the accommodations conversation is like three levels into where we need to start. Does that make sense? Because first, we need to go, hey, wait a second. We're suffering. We're struggling. Why are we suffering and struggling so much? Is there anything that can be done? Well, wait a second. Now I have this language. I have this verbiage, I have this more socially acceptable way. For example, right before we met, Helena was sharing some information with me about bookkeeping that I needed to know, and I stopped and said, Hey Helena, can you send that to me in email? Because I need it in writing, because I'm autistic. I'm not going to remember whatever it is I need to put on the paperwork. And she's going to have to email me anyway because I'm going to email her later and say, Hey, Helena, remember that

thing you said, can you send it to me in writing? There's a lot of this having to say over and over again and the self-advocacy is so exhausting. Any parents out there who've done the advocacy for their kids know that this is so exhausting. Then you get labelled as the squeaky wheel or that difficult parent or difficult woman. Right? It's this whole machine that's keeping us trapped in this separation. None of it has to do with the content or the smartness or the potential or your caring as an instructor. All of it is this rigid thinking and rigid structure that we've come from, and we're coming out of, just like with racial and ethnic and with gender and sexuality. All of these things are shifting and we're right on time now, we're finally getting to the brain. I hope that after we're done with that, we can just all be human beings.

"When we listen and celebrate what is both common and different, we become wiser, more inclusive, and better as an organization." This is a quote from Pat Wadors.

I'm going to give you three steps that are somewhat, we'll say from the organizational point of view, from the top down. You could use this in family. You could use this in classroom, you could use this in the workplace, you could use this in your staff meetings. This is a very top down, but it is applicable in community. Then after that, I'm going to give you, for the teachers out there because I know there are lots of you and you're really waiting for this. You're really hoping for this. I'm going to give you some right now implementable things you can do for your students. I promise it's coming. All right. We're going to look at these three steps. These are my registered trademark, three steps to increase neurodiversity inclusion. Step 1 is to build psychological safety. Of course, you can say, I have an open door policy, or there's no such thing as a silly question, or you can come and talk to me any time, or I encourage you to share your experience. We can say that, but all of us know how it feels when it's true and when it's not true. So it's not something that you can say we have unless you are regularly hearing people that you're interacting with, share their vulnerable authentic experience, to be able to be feeling embarrassed, feeling sad, feeling vulnerable. Bridging these gaps, taking these risks without any bad feeling or fallout to occur. This is the main thing that keeps the folks that you're working with who have formal diagnosis of neurodivergent conditions from coming out and from reporting and for requesting accommodations. This is the number one stop because they may not be promoted. They may not be given larger work projects or larger clients. They may be a bit dumbed down. If they disclose, there's still this stigma we've been talking about. And it's on the institutional level and on the individual level. We have to start with psychological safety because if we don't, we can't get anywhere. Increase neurodiversity inclusion step 2, curiosity and conversation. I think everyone would agree that there are very few things we wouldn't be able to solve if we had both of these things in play. The psychological safety, and that we're approaching it with curiosity and conversation. We're beginning to dismantle our own personal bias. We're learning that everything we were taught might not still be true. For example, we were all taught how to drive and the safest place to hold your hands on the steering wheel are ten and two. But it's not now. It's nine and three. Hah, the world is changing, Because we're learning and things are changing around us. This can sometimes feel like things are happening to us. This is one more thing I have to keep in mind when I'm designing my courses. This is one more thing I have to be sensitive about when I'm speaking

with colleagues or talking with students. It isn't just one more thing. It's one of the most fundamental things that's always at play. It's very difficult for us to not feel like we're overwhelmed, especially educators. Taking that time to just have the curiosity and have the conversation about it. No one knows what's going on in our own mind, and that's part of the biggest detriment to us to wellness, to mental health, to authenticity and to true connection. Nobody knows all the stuff that I do behind the scenes in my own mind in order to approach a situation or get through an ordeal or create this webinar, for example. Helena and Paula have a sense of it because they knew I was anxious and needed to step away before I started so I could be fresh for you. But when we started the webinar, we sounded a whole lot softer and slower than we did when we had our run through at the beginning. That's because we're all anxious, and that's normal and it's good because it's showing us that we care. But we don't want to live on that treadmill.

And step 3 for increased neurodiversity inclusion, flexibility, and compassion. Please stop requiring people to have their camera on in Zoom meetings. It's exhausting for everyone. I know, as a teacher, when I'm looking at a screen full of blank screens or names or little pictures, it is not as engaging as having a bunch of fresh faces in front of me in a classroom. However, it helps us so much to take that spaciousness. If you're here today and you've turned your camera off for the first time, I hope you notice the difference. I hope you feel less tired throughout the day. The other thing I want to mention is back-to-back meetings are harmful for all of us. I don't know if you've noticed, but it seems to me an awful lot of people have meetings that start at 11:00 and end at noon, and then they have another meeting that starts at noon and ends at 1:00, and then they have another meeting that starts at 1:00 and ends at noon. I like to tell people, especially in corporations and non-profits and schools, as much as you can, make your meetings, have a day where you have no meetings or have a block of time where you have no meetings, and make your meetings, imagine that you have to go from a physical building to another physical building. Because that will help you integrate and normalize some space, to use the washroom, to get some water, to close your eyes, to move your body, to eat something. We're all so frantically trying to keep up that we're not actually keeping up with ourselves. The other thing here is mentioning your scheduling. So I was talking about earlier, the executive functioning piece. You can make a huge difference in your students' lives, and in your own workflows if you have some check-in points, instead of letting that due date just be in the distance, and then all of a sudden, it's on them or it's on you. I like to have those in my own life and I have a gym buddy, like an accountability buddy for various things, like, Hey, did you actually do that thing you said you were going to do by the 15th? Because it helps me, and then I can support them in something that they're having a challenge getting done as well.

So "Diversity is getting a dinner invitation. Inclusion is making sure everyone enjoys the meal." Barasha Medhi. For those of us who have food restrictions, food allergies, and dietary stuff. We definitely understand this, right? You can go to someone's house and you can try to be polite, but you'll end up hungry and silently resentful. So there is a big difference between being encouraging of diversity and actually facilitating inclusion. This is a great way to say it plus who doesn't love food?

So as promised, for those of you who are teachers, this is the money slide. Three immediately implementable steps to support your neurodiverse students. Flexible assignment formats. I can tell you, as I stand here before you today, I was offered a fully paid PhD opportunity at my master's program. They really wanted me to pursue a PhD, and I said, no, but then they kept asking. So I said, Okay, I need funding. They said, that's great. We got that covered. And I said, I need to provide all my deliverables and findings in an audio-visual format, and they said, no. Now, this was in 2007, but I don't think it's changed a whole lot in academia. We have an opportunity, especially in post-secondary, to offer different types of formats. If you feel like you're stressed and you don't want to have to think about it or you can't imagine what another format might be because you're very comfortable in one of them, usually written. Ask your students, say, "Hey, why don't you pitch it to me, what you'd like to do to show to me your understanding, to demonstrate your understanding, and to fit the requirements of this exam or this final project?" You'd be amazed at what they may present to you. Some of them might even use an online gaming and they'll get really into it. They'll spend way more time engaging with the content than they would have if they were just simply trying to memorize and reproduce. Providing clear structure. Giving explicit instructions can't hurt anyone. I want to give you another example that happened to me recently. I'm in a class that just started and it goes for 10 weeks, and mid-second week, we got an email saying, Here's a new Zoom link. We had the Zoom link, and that's it. I emailed back and said, Hey, that's great. Thank you. Can you let me know if this is the Zoom link for today or if this is the Zoom link for the rest of the eight weeks that are left. I got no answer because that person is really overwhelmed. Then it happened again a few days later, I got another email saying, Hey, just a reminder, here's our Zoom link. I wrote back and said, Hey, thanks for sharing that. Just a quick question. Can you let me know if that Zoom link is for today or if it's for the remainder of the eight weeks? I got a response. It's for the whole time. We can help each other out and minimize email, it takes an average of seven emails to set up a meeting. How can we be more clear and get that up front? And encouraging self-advocacy. A lot of your students it's a brand new experience for them to be managing their own money, to be managing their own time, to be managing their own on-screen time, to be learning to drive, out there voting, getting their heart broken, getting their heart filled. All of it's happening to them. And a lot of them were not served by their parents taking care of all of this before they were 19, and then taking care of none of it once they transition to that adulthood status. A lot of these students are going to need a formal assessment. They're going to need the support and advocacy of their parents. They're going to need their parents to help them get those things done. We can be the ones to say, here's what you need to do. I'm going to refer you to this, here's some information. You can give them my contact information.

So here we are. We made it. I know there's at least 800 questions in the chat, but we're going to try to cover as many as we can. I hope that so far, you've gotten not one, not two, but at least three things that made it worth your time and effort to be here today. If you're watching this on the video later on and you weren't able to attend live, please don't hesitate to reach out. I know that whether you speak up or whether you say something in the chat or whether

you don't say anything at all, that you are fully engaging with this content, and I'm really, really pleased that you're here with me today so thank you.

HELENA:

Thank you, Jenine. There are about nine, but two comments, and I still invite people if they want to. Go ahead. Ask questions. The first one I'll ask is, I think you did touch on it after it was posted, but just for clarification. The person asked if neurodiversity refers to "natural variations," that's in quotations, why are out workings of it, like autism, ADHD, et cetera considered disorders in the DSM?

JENINE:

That's a wonderful thing. I don't know if you've noticed, but human beings tend to put everything into a binary in order to understand and grapple with a more complex idea. For example, the answer is either true or false. Your gender and sex is either female or male, and you're either neurodiverse, sorry, neurotypical or neurodivergent. The Diagnostic Statistical Manual 5 is the one that's coming out in the next two years, and I guarantee you that the neurodiversity definitions and criteria will have changed. They changed in the last edition. It's got a long and fraught history that I can't really speak to other than to say, it's a very flawed working document, and it very much reflects our societal confusion and bias. Remember that homosexuality was in the DSM for many, many years. In Canada, neurodiversity is considered a disability, and there are actual financial supports that you can receive if you have a formal diagnosis, which is the reason why I pursued with such vigor the formal diagnosis. Remember that difference between the self-diagnosed or the suspected and the actual piece of paper that says, I have this. That is the game changer. The DSM is what the clinicians use to diagnose any and all things that are "wrong" with us. My message to anyone about pretty much anything is there's nothing wrong with you. That was one of the big reliefs for me. Go ahead, Helena.

HELENA:

I think the next one segues beautifully from what you just said. It says, Can you talk about the ways that having a formal diagnosis of autism has been helpful for you?

JENINE:

Absolutely. Number one, I get to stand right here in my controlled environment, which has low light, no smells, very little sounds, and no one else, except an occasional kitten, to present to you and say, this is my heartbreaking and beautiful experience. Please let us help others who are having a heartbreaking and beautiful experience. If you yourself believe that you're neurodivergent, I'm going to tell you right now that you probably are. You may or may not need to pursue a formal diagnosis. If you do pursue a formal diagnosis, you might not even tell anyone. It's not about that. It's about standing in your own authentic self and saying all these things that weren't working for me. How many of them can I cross off my list and stop doing? I've worked very hard to stop masking and to ask for what I need and to be able to say, I need that because I'm autistic, isn't something that I love to say. It's something that other people love to hear. If I said, Oh, Helena, can you please email that to me instead of telling me? Helena

might actually feel frustrated and disrespectful or disrespected because I'm standing here in a meeting with her and she's telling it to me. If I'm on this mission to save email, why wouldn't I just note that down? for example. It comes across very differently in social settings, which is pretty much everything we do when we're not by ourselves. Also, I was able to apply for and receive the disability tax credit, and it helps me to help my friends and colleagues and everybody I'm meeting through this new neurodiversity consultancy to say, I am. I am actually autistic. You can be educated. You can be articulate. You can be outgoing in certain situations, and you can be helpful to humanity. You don't have to feel that you are less than, and you don't have to feel that you are not able to function in the society that wasn't built for you. That's just some of the stuff. I hope that answers it well. Next question Helena.

HELENA:

Thank you. We have about 5. Maybe 2 minutes per question. The next one is asking your opinion. Is there any thought that PTSD and the neurological changes that accompany that are part of neurodivergence? That's a tricky one, the way it's worded. You don't get PTSD from being neurodivergent. Whoever wrote that, can you please just do a little chaser thing or maybe pop on and unmute and tell us a little bit clearer question? I'd be happy to answer it.

PARTICIPANT:

So it's just in reference to some of the neurological pathway changes that happen in PTSD and whether or not, I know it's not something you're born with. It's not a congenital thing, but it is definite neurological changes, whether that's considered to be part of neurodivergence or that's, especially in an educational context.

JENINE:

Yeah. Thank you for that. Thank you very much for clarifying. I'm going to say that PTSD is a separate thing. I'm not saying that you can be neurotypical or neurodiverse and not have PTSD. They're just very separate. One thing that I think I failed to mention that is a very important key point, especially for you parents out here and for you students out here who have parents. Neurodiverse individuals do not come from neurotypical parents, and they don't just appear from the universe. For example, an autistic person such as myself, had one or more autistic parents. And my parents, of course, in their generation, never knew that. And they're not around anymore, so I can't tell them. And I can tell you in my own experience, even if they were, they wouldn't believe me. So if you are a parent and your child is dyslexic or autistic or has ADHD or anything else, you need to take a look and maybe get a screen yourself. My hope for Canada and for the world is that anytime a child is obtaining a formal diagnosis that the parents are automatically assessed. Because you can imagine how much that would change the dynamic and support the whole family unit in what they're working on and their lives, right? Last question, Helena.

HELENA:

I struggled to find unmute there. Yes, there are many. Let's do this one. If there's time, the person said, I think I would like to hear if you have any recommendations for ways to make

physical spaces more inclusive for neurodiverse individuals or resources you would recommend on this topic.

JENINE:

Fantastic. That's a great question. By the way, Helena is going to share all of these questions with me and my contact information is on the screen. In fact, here, I'm just going to advance a slide while I answer that last question. My website is also listed here.

<https://www.jeninelillian.com/>

Okay, so, physical spaces. Depending on the type of brains that are involved in the space, they might have different answers from me. But let's say that you want to have more inclusivity across a broad range and you don't want to create a culture where people have to disclose something or request an accommodation to feel good. I am assuming that's your intention. For example, have less lights. Have no smells. Have a scent-free policy in your workplace, for example, and really mean it. It's not just cologne, it's body wash and the whole thing. That can be very difficult for a lot of us. Universal design applies not just to education, but also to all things from chairs to office spaces. So I would say, take a look at that. Making it less sensory and more just get there and be there. So depending on what type of environment you're talking about, I'm going to use a classroom for an example. Making sure that it's not super bright, making sure that it's not loud, if possible.

Even if you're doing a slide deck, for example, this is my busiest slide I'm sharing with you today and I don't love it. The reason it has so much stuff on it is because I wanted to show you I could put my contact information and still not have it really overwhelming hopefully. So do your slides with no animations or no cute pictures or no, I don't know if those of you who jumped on early, you might have seen an animated calendar of events for BCcampus. And I found that very a lot when I first joined before I was able to enter. So you can reach out to me, by the way, whoever asked this question and for any other questions, and you will be receiving a resource list that I created specifically for those of you who are attending today, which has information on this very thing. How to make an inclusive campus, how to make an inclusive classroom, and other ways that you can feel supported in your work and that your students will feel included whether they're neurodivergent or not. Because remember anytime we elevate the experience for a neurodivergent person, we elevate the experience for everyone. Thank you so much, and I wish we had three more hours, and I know that we're going to meet again at some point soon. Please don't hesitate to reach out to me and send me your feedback.