

Whether a person is neurodivergent or not, everyone has their own individual set of needs to feel supported and included. Here are some key takeaways on **how to support neurodiverse paddlers**.

Improve your understanding

Knowledge about neurodiversity and how it impacts people's daily lives can be low. This can lead to fewer people understanding these experiences. Improving your knowledge about neurodiversity and neurodivergent conditions ensures you can support more people, avoid stereotyping, and make paddling more neuroinclusive.



Take time to understand individual needs

Understanding individual needs is good practice regardless of a person's identity or experience. It can help everyone feel understood and supported. Taking the time to understand the specific needs a neurodivergent person has, and how you can personally support them can go a long way in helping them to enjoy paddling.



Think about how you share information

Everyone processes and absorbs information in different ways. This can be challenging when there is a lot to share. Could you share information in multiple formats, such as written and verbal? Is the setting you share information in quiet and free from distractions? Have you checked whether the information made sense to them?



Avoid making assumptions

Even for people with the same neurodivergent condition, there is a range of experiences and needs. Avoid making blanket assumptions about a group, or labelling neurodivergent people universally. This will ensure neurodiverse paddlers are well-supported in their environments, and avoids perpetuating stereotypes.



Coaches are pivotal to enjoyable paddling experiences, for new and experienced paddlers. Their support on the water is essential. Below are key takeaways on how **coaches can support neurodiverse paddlers**.

Adopt a person-centred approach

A person-centred approach is a cornerstone of the BCAB coaching philosophy. It helps coaches get the most out of participants, and creates opportunities for them to share their knowledge and expertise in different ways. Working with neurodivergent paddlers during coaching can ensure they feel supported, and get the most out of paddling.



Understand how participants learn best

Through a person-centred approach, coaches should spend time understanding how neurodivergent paddlers learn and absorb information, and improve their experience. How can you break down information in a way that is more manageable? Would some paddlers benefit from video analysis or visual aids, for example?



Take a strengths-based approach

A strengths based approach means focussing on people's capabilities, rather than what they might not be able to do. Building their confidence about their strengths can support them to excel in their paddling performance. Be mindful that neurodivergent paddlers may put themselves in a state of burnout if not supported to rest.



Continue support for high-performance

It is likely that high-performance coaches will work with neurodivergent athletes in their career. High-performance settings can be overwhelming, and athletes may find unsupportive spaces very difficult to navigate. Coaches must be able to support neurodivergent athletes, as their need for support continues even as a performance athlete.



Clubs are hubs of social connection, shared interest, and supportive environments. It's important that they consider how they can be welcoming for all. Here are tips on how **clubs can support neurodiverse paddlers**.

Empower volunteers with knowledge

It will benefit your club to ensure that volunteers are educated about neurodiversity and how they can support neurodiverse paddlers. Your committee and key volunteers, such as team managers, should have access to resources to develop understanding, and opportunities to learn about topics they feel less confident about.



Take time to listen to your members

An estimated 1 in 7 people in the UK are neurodivergent, so it's easy to imagine that members of your club may be neurodivergent, whether or not they have a diagnosis. If you survey your members, focussing on the lived experiences of neurodivergent members to inform more inclusive practices, can have significant impact.



Challenge non-inclusive behaviour

Neurodivergent people face exclusion in their day-to-day lives for various reasons. If inappropriate or non-inclusive behaviour occur, clear steps must be taken to tackle this and prevent it from happening again. Ensure people who engage in this behaviour are provided with education and resources to understand the impact of their actions.



Be open to supporting reasonable adjustments

Reasonable adjustments are steps clubs can take to support a person to engage with your activities. They might include allowing people to bring a trusted person to sessions, offering club information in various formats, or one-to-one support on the water. Adjustments can be temporary or ongoing - everyone's needs are different.

