

# Neurodivergence and the Strength-Based Classroom

The following activities are designed to make you think. They also include activities to share with your paraprofessionals, classroom staff, colleagues, or to use as staff development activities. We encourage you choose one item from each area to implement within the next week.

We encourage you to keep thinking about your classroom in a strength-based way. These areas are just the tip of the iceberg.

Included in this packet are:

- Checking Our Perceptions—sample and worksheet
- Think Outside the Box—sample and worksheet
- Strength-Based Language—sample and worksheet
- Strength-Based Environment activity
- Changing Perceptions Through Positive Language activity
- Strength-Based Instruction worksheet
- Final Thoughts and a freebie

## Checking Our Perceptions—Sample

How often have we made an assumption about why a student is engaging in a particular behavior? Are these assumptions accurate or right to make? We cannot presume to truly know why another person has done something without investigating.

**Directions:** Review the sample table below, then fill out the table on the next page.

Sample table:

Commonly heard	Check our perceptions: investigate and ask questions	Affirming version
They know how to do this. hey just don't want to.	What is causing them discomfort? (create checklist)	<i>They appear dysregulated.</i>
They are just seeking attention.	Why is this a bad thing?	<i>They are trying to interact or engage with us.</i>
They don't like eye contact or to be around people.	Is eye contact necessary to engage?	<i>Making eye contact is uncomfortable for them.</i>
They don't talk so they have nothing to say.	Am I misinterpreting their actions? Do they have an effective way to communicate?	<i>Talking is not the only way to communicate.</i>

## Checking Our Perceptions (continued)

After reviewing the previous page, fill out the table below.

<b>Commonly heard</b>	<b>Check our perceptions: investigate and ask questions</b>	<b>Affirming version</b>

## Think Outside the Box—Sample

**Directions:** Read the scenario below, then review the sample. Think outside the box and come up with other possibilities.

### Meet Alex.

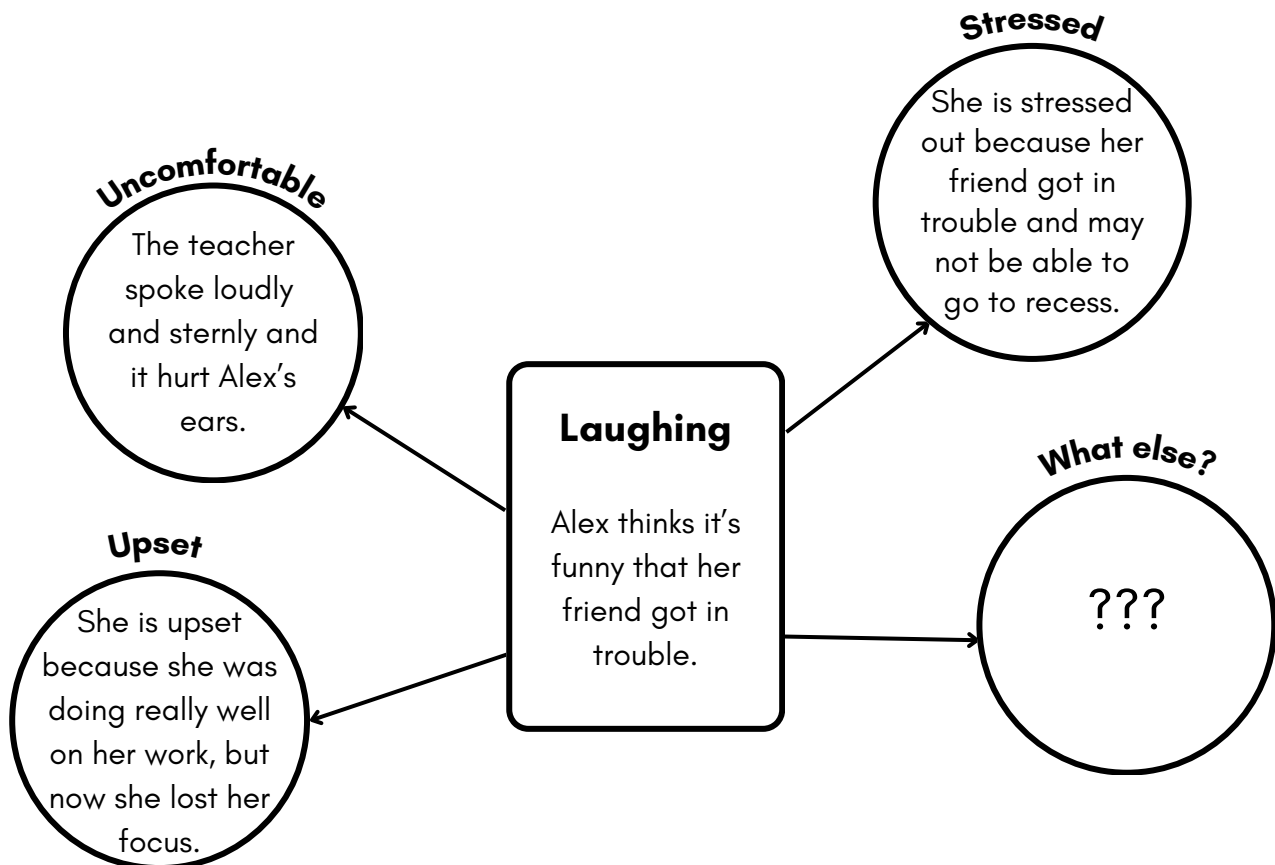
Alex is sitting in class. Suddenly one of her friends gets very upset and throws a book. The teacher is angry at the other student. Alex starts to laugh.



### Why is Alex laughing?

We might jump to conclusion and assume that she thinks it's funny that her friend got in trouble.

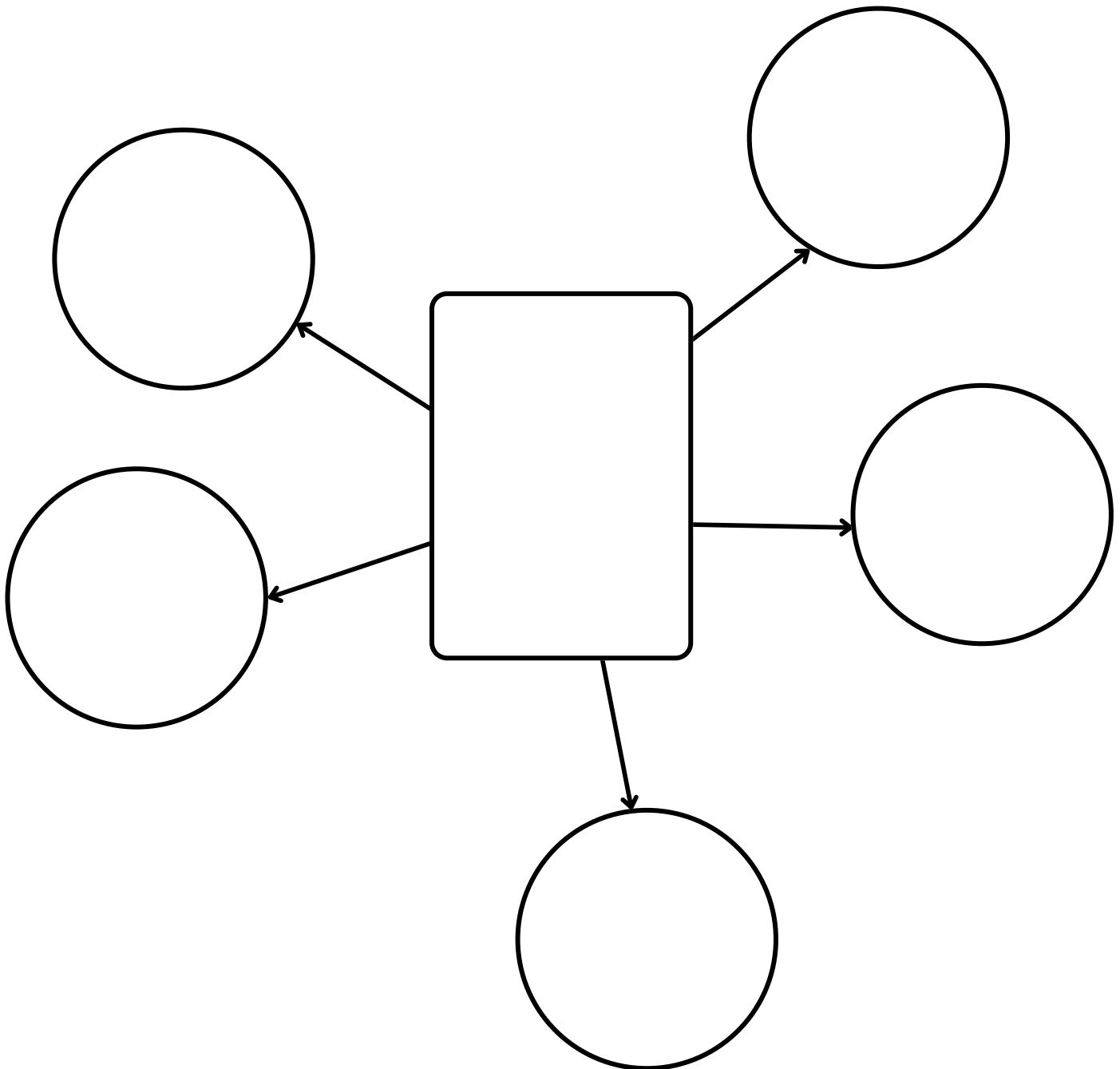
Instead, let's think outside the box.



## Think Outside the Box Worksheet

**Directions:** Review the sample on the previous page. Think of a scenario from your classroom and think outside the box. What are other possibilities for why a student acted in a certain way?

Check your perceptions: investigate and ask questions.



## Strength-Based Language—Sample

We need to challenge assumptions by rethinking our own language, behaviors, and expectations.

*Read these with your colleagues or classroom staff and discuss. Then fill out the following activity page.*

**Assumption:** Stimming interferes with learning and should be interrupted.

**Reboot:** *Stimming is a form of self-regulation and helps individuals learn.*

**Assumption:** Stimming needs to be redirected because it looks strange and people stare.

**Reboot:** *So what? Let's teach people that stimming is ok. And that staring is rude.*

**Assumption:** You need to be seated in order to listen and learn.

**Reboot:** *People listen and learn in different ways. That's ok.*

**Assumption:** Non-verbal/non-speaking individuals are "low-functioning."

**Reboot:** *Non-speaking individuals are often highly intelligent and can communicate in a variety of ways.*

**Assumption:** You must make eye contact in order to listen and pay attention.

**Reboot:** *Many autistic individuals are dysregulated by eye contact and can't see and hear at the same time.*

**Assumption:** "Attention-seeking" is the cause of many unwanted behaviors.

**Reboot:** *There's nothing wrong with seeking attention. Hello! Isn't that what we want kids to do?*

**Assumption:** As an educator, my job is to maintain control in my classroom.

**Reboot:** *As an educator, my job is to support students in learning to control their own behavior and to learn to self-regulate.*

**Assumption:** If a student constantly tries to jump on the trampoline, it can be used as a reinforcer or a privilege they can earn.

**Reboot:** *If a student constantly tries to jump on the trampoline, it's a sensory need, and they should be allowed to jump on the trampoline. Sensory activities are not a privilege; they are a necessity and a right.*

## Strength-Based Language Worksheet

We need to challenge assumptions by rethinking our own language, behaviors, and expectations.

*After reviewing the previous page with your team or staff, generate a list of assumptions educators, service providers, or employers may be making at your own site.*

**Assumption:**

***Reboot:***

**Assumption:**

***Reboot:***

**Assumption:**

***Reboot:***

**Assumption:**

***Reboot:***

**Assumption:**

***Reboot:***

## Strength-Based Environment

- Be more mindful—How mindful are you in your classroom or workspace?
- Make the classroom or workspace more predictable—What are the ways you currently make the classroom or workspace predictable? How could you improve?
- Build a relationship and become someone to trust—What are you doing to build good relationships with your students or employees?

## Changing Perceptions Through Positive Language

List three "behaviors" occurring in your setting. Now rephrase, using positive language and building on the individual's strengths.

Example-

**Behavior:** Alejandro is non-compliant.

**Rephrase:** *Alejandro is learning to advocate for himself by expressing his preferences.*

**Behavior:**

**Rephrase:**

**Behavior:**

**Rephrase:**

**Behavior:**

**Rephrase:**



# Strength-Based Instruction

**Instructions:** Fill in the names of your students at the top, using multiple pages, if needed. Complete the worksheet, with the help of classroom staff, and use the results to make your instruction more strength-based.

Student names				
<b>Learning style</b> <i>circle one</i>	Auditory	Auditory	Auditory	Tactile/Kinesthetic
	Visual	Visual	Visual	Visual
	Tactile/Kinesthetic	Tactile/Kinesthetic	Tactile/Kinesthetic	Tactile/Kinesthetic
	Other	Other	Other	Other
<b>Best/favorite subject</b> <i>fill in</i>				
<b>Special interest(s)</b> <i>fill in</i>				
<b>Favorite music</b> <i>circle one</i>	Rock	Rock	Rock	Rock
	Pop	Pop	Pop	Pop
	Country	Country	Country	Country
	Latin	Latin	Latin	Latin
	Rap/Hip Hop	Rap/Hip Hop	Rap/Hip Hop	Rap/Hip Hop
	Jazz	Jazz	Jazz	Jazz
	Other	Other	Other	Other
<b>Favorite video or tv character</b> <i>fill in</i>				
<b>Other strengths or interests</b> <i>fill in</i>				
<b>Ideas for themes—jot down ideas</b>				

## ***The Story of the Starfish***

*One day a man was walking on a beach when he saw a boy, surrounded by thousands of stranded starfish. The boy was picking up one starfish at a time and throwing it back into the water. "What are you doing?" the man asked the boy. "I'm saving the starfish," he replied. The man said, "There are thousands of them! How can you hope to make a difference?!?" The boy threw a starfish into the water and said, "I made a difference to that one."*

Dear Educators,

Thank you for all you do. Let's keep changing the world, one starfish at a time!

Warmly,

*Ruth and Renè*



Thank you for attending our presentation!  
Scan the QR code for a freebie.



For questions or comments, you can reach us at:  
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For additional resources and information, find us at:  
[www.autismmovingforward.com](http://www.autismmovingforward.com)



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