

Learning About Neurodiversity at School

A resource pack for
primary school teachers
and pupils

Alcorn, Fletcher-Watson, McGeown, Murray, Aitken, Peacock, & Mandy



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The full credits and acknowledgements
for the LEANS resource pack appear
in Appendix C of this handbook, and
on the LEANS resource website

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[https://www.ed.ac.uk/salvesen-
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Creating LEANS has been a labour of love from many people, some of whom have never met except through video calls. Almost all the development has happened online. This turned out to be a blessing in disguise, as it allowed more people to be part of this project around their busy lives. All of us share the same belief: that schools could be more understanding and accepting places for *all* pupils. We think that teaching and learning about neurodiversity can be an important tool toward that goal.

From the start, LEANS was never intended to be “the last word” on neurodiversity teaching. That’s just not possible, with a topic that’s ultimately about the richness and complexity of human experience. There *are* perspectives and challenges that aren’t included in LEANS. Classroom hours and attention spans are finite, and any single resource can only cover so much. As we discuss in the Introduction, we intended LEANS as a way to open conversations on a complex topic that schools may not yet be discussing. It’s meant to be a starting place—and won’t be the *right* starting place for every classroom. We have reflected very carefully on where LEANS might be a helpful, ethical choice, and where it won’t. We ask *you* to do your part by self-evaluating how LEANS may fit your class (Part 1, section 2).

If the topics you discover in LEANS interest you and your pupils, that is wonderful, and we say “*please keep going!*”. Seek out other resources and voices, especially the neurodivergent voices that are out there across every medium. They may or may not agree with one another, or agree with LEANS—and that’s part of the point. The realities of neurodiversity and neurodivergence are as ambiguous and messy as the rest of life. If you take only one thing from LEANS, we hope it is this: neurodiversity is an inextricable part of all our lives, even if you’ve never heard that word before. It’s about here, now, and us.

A M Alcorn

February 2022

The LEANS checklist for classroom teachers

Are you a teacher interested in delivering LEANS? This handbook is your best tool — it's like a training course in a book!

Here's how to get started:

1. Read the **handbook introduction**, which explains what LEANS is about, what's involved, and what it can and can't do for your class (starts page 12).
2. Complete a **self-evaluation** to assess if LEANS would be a good fit for your class, right now (starts page 33). Self-evaluation is essential. LEANS won't be practical or ethical in every setting.

If your self evaluation result suggests that LEANS is a good choice in your class...

3. Continue by reading **Parts 2 and 3 of the handbook**, covering neurodiversity background information, and advice and preparations steps leading up to LEANS delivery.
4. **Agree safety planning** around neurodiversity teaching. Make sure all members of classroom staff know the plan!
5. **Review, prepare and deliver the pupil-facing content from Part 4 of the handbook**, working through the seven units in order, over one or more terms of the school year.

Table of Contents

PART 1 INTRODUCTION TO THE RESOURCE PACK	11
1. Introducing LEANS	12
1.1 About LEANS: the who, what, when, where, and why	14
1.2 How might LEANS impact your class?	25
2. Self evaluation: is LEANS is right for your class, right now?	33
2.1 What is the self-evaluation, and why do it?	33
2.2 LEANS self-evaluation exercise	35
PART 2 A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO NEURODIVERSITY	41
1. What is neurodiversity?	42
1.1 Neurodiversity vocabulary	43
1.2 Focusing on experiences over diagnostic labels	45
1.3 What's the relationship between neurodiversity and terms like ASN, ALN or SEND?	47
2. A primer on brains and information processing	48
2.1 What does the brain do?	48
2.2 Tackling 4 famous neuro-myths	51
PART 3 PREPARING TO DELIVER LEANS IN YOUR CLASS	53
1. How is the LEANS resource content structured, and why?	54
2. Recommended delivery and making changes	58
3. Safety issues, risks, and pre-delivery safety planning	69
3.1 LEANS and potential risks	69
3.2 What are some of the safety issues around teaching neurodiversity, and what can you do?	70
3.3 Pre-delivery safety planning for classroom staff	73
PART 4 LEANS CONTENT BY UNIT	77
Unit reference	78
1. How this part of the handbook is organised	78
2. About resource item time estimates	79
3. About LEANS unit posters	80
4. Overview: The LEANS characters and stories	81

UNIT 1 INTRODUCTION TO NEURODIVERSITY	89
Should I introduce neurodiversity before Unit 1?.....	90
Unit 1 summary for teachers.....	91
1.1 Would you rather...?.....	94
1.2 "Meet the class"	100
1.3 Introducing neurodiversity	101
1.4 "Neurodiversity is new"	104
UNIT 2 LEARNING AND THINKING DIFFERENTLY	107
Unit 2 summary for teachers.....	108
2.1 "Same lessons, different experiences"	110
2.2. The Mind's Eye.....	112
2.3 "Drawing new conclusions"	119
UNIT 3 COMMUNICATION AND UNDERSTANDING	121
Authors' note on Unit 3: Why is communication so important?	122
Unit 3 summary for teachers.....	123
3.1 Communication brainstorm	125
3.2 Silent film detectives	127
3.3 Ambiguous scenes	135
3.4 "You're not listening!"	140
3.5 Communication reflection.....	144
UNIT 4 GETTING ALONG TOGETHER AT SCHOOL	147
Unit 4 summary for teachers.....	148
4.1 "Much ado about posters"	150
4.2 School scenarios.....	152
4.3 Explaining needs and wants	157
4.4 "I want, I need"	159
UNIT 5 IS THAT FAIR?.....	161
What does fairness have to do with neurodiversity?.....	162
Unit 5 summary for teachers.....	163
5.1 Is that fair?	166
5.2 "The fairest classroom ever" + Defining fairness	169
5.3 Explaining fairness	172
5.4 "Text and balances"	174
5.5 Let's talk it over	177

UNIT 6 DIFFERENT WAYS TO MAKE A FRIENDSHIP	181
Unit 6 summary for teachers.....	182
6.1 "Second chances"	184
6.2 What is a recipe?.....	185
6.3 Friendship recipes	187
6.4 "Are we still friends?"	198
UNIT 7 NEURODIVERSITY IN OUR CLASSROOM.....	201
Unit 7 summary for teachers.....	202
7.1 Reviewing Key LEANS concepts	204
7.2 "Surprises big and small"	207
7.3 Ripple effects	209
7.4 Classroom commitments	216
7.5 "Not quite the end"	221
Wrapping up the LEANS curriculum	223
PART 5 BUILDING ON THE LEANS RESOURCE PACK.....	225
1. Preparing for conversations with pupils, parents, and carers.....	226
1.1 Talking to parents and carers about delivering LEANS	226
1.2 Talking to pupils about issues in the LEANS curriculum.....	229
2. Further resources and links.....	232
2.1 LEANS materials online.....	232
2.2 Neurodiversity readings for educators	233

REFERENCES	235
Appendix A: How LEANS was created	237
A.1 The project leadership team.....	237
A.2 Expert participatory design phase.....	238
A.3 Consultation phase	239
A.4 Development phase	240
A.5 Evaluation study in schools	240
A.6 Revisions and release	244
Appendix B: List of all LEANS Key Points	245
Appendix C: Credits and acknowledgements.....	248
Appendix D: Full terms of use for the LEANS resource pack	252

Part 1

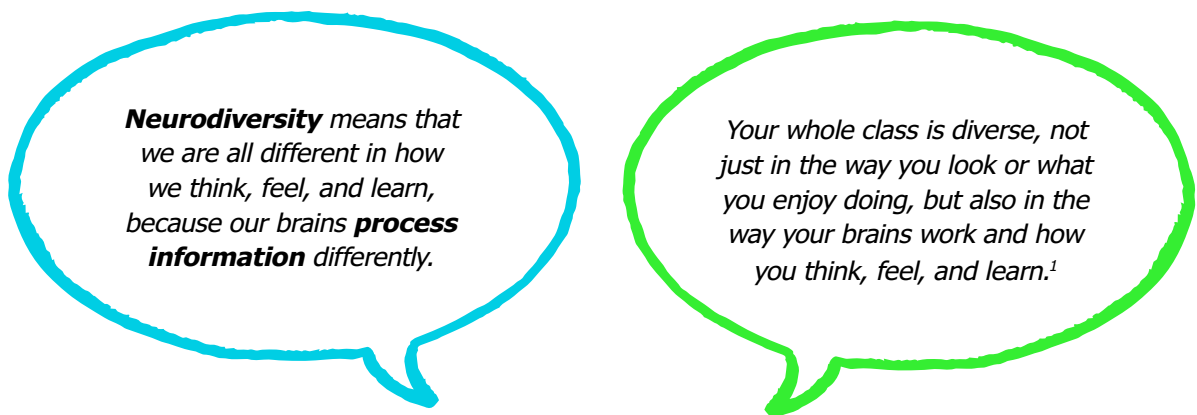
Introduction to the resource pack



1. Introducing LEANS

Welcome to the Learning About Neurodiversity at School (LEANS) resource pack! Delivering the LEANS resources is a way for primary school teachers of children 8-11 to introduce the concept of **neurodiversity** to their class, and explore how it affects people's everyday experiences. Schools currently may teach about the diversity of people's cultures or beliefs, but usually do not teach about neurodiversity. This resource aims to help change that. It was developed especially for primary schools by a neurodiverse team of researchers and educators, led by the University of Edinburgh.

So, what is neurodiversity? In LEANS, the definition that pupils will hear is:



Neurodiversity is an important idea. It has been developed by neurodivergent² people—and lots of neurodivergent people are finding the idea an important way of understanding themselves and their place in the world. LEANS provides you with a way to share that transformational knowledge with young people, and to include everyone in your class in that learning. We think that understanding neurodiversity is an important step on the pathway to acceptance and understanding of each other.

Teaching about neurodiversity is more akin to topics like citizenship or health than it is to teaching about photosynthesis or adjectives. It's a topic that doesn't neatly "finish", because its implications are all around us in daily life. Our understandings of it will mature as we have new experiences and make further connections. **LEANS is intended to be an introduction to this complex and sensitive topic, and the start of a longer conversation in your class.** Even when the LEANS curriculum is over, pupils will still be making sense of things, and perhaps reconsidering others—or themselves.

¹ Part 2 of the handbook, A teacher's guide to neurodiversity, gives a more "grown up" explanation of neurodiversity, and also gives a primer on brains and information processing.

² If you're not familiar with these terms, key definitions start in on page 43

To get started with considering what LEANS is, who it's for, and how to deliver it, we've rounded up some important questions and their answers in Table 1—it's LEANS in a nutshell!

Table 1 The LEANS resource pack in a nutshell

What is LEANS?	This resource introduces the concept of neurodiversity to children, and how it is relevant to their own schools and lives. It is a multi-session curriculum, with a mix of hands-on activities, storytelling, and factual resource items. LEANS was developed by a neurodiverse team of researchers and educators.
Why should a class deliver LEANS?	Better-informed, more accepting school communities can help make school experiences more positive—for everyone. LEANS' goals are to change pupils' knowledge about neurodiversity, their beliefs about neurodivergence, and the actions they take at school.
Where should I deliver LEANS?	LEANS is for whole-class delivery in mainstream primary schools ³ , to children ages 8-11.
Who should deliver LEANS?	LEANS is delivered by class teachers, but it won't be the right tool for every class. Use the self-evaluation exercise to help you decide (Part 1, section 2).
When should I deliver LEANS?	Delivering LEANS takes an estimated 15-19 hours of classroom delivery time. We recommend spreading this over at least one school term.
How can I deliver LEANS?	This teacher handbook is a 'one stop shop' for developing your understanding of neurodiversity concepts, guidance on teaching this topic, and LEANS activity plans. It's like a training course, in a book! The resource pack provides all you need to get up to speed on neurodiversity, and to prepare and deliver LEANS. It's all free of charge, but does require a time investment, especially the first time you deliver it. We recommend spending 6-8 hours in initial programme preparation, to work through the handbook content and the planning and safety steps it outlines.

³ Across the UK, this term means schools that are not specialist provision for children with disabilities. These are the type of schools the majority of children attend.

The rest of the Introduction unpacks these points a bit more, and explains more fully what the resource pack is and isn't—plus why we think it's so valuable to teach about neurodiversity at all! Finally, we consider possible impacts LEANS could have in your class.



Even though the LEANS resources are free, we know your time is not! Delivering LEANS requires a time investment to learn about neurodiversity, do safety planning, and prepare the content. **We strongly encourage you to work through the introduction before making a decision about delivering LEANS.** These teaching materials might not cover the issues you are looking for, or might not be a good fit for your setting.

1.1 About LEANS: the who, what, when, where, and why

1.1.1 What is the LEANS resource pack?

The main purpose of the LEANS resource is to introduce the concept of *neurodiversity* to school pupils in the 8-11 age group, and to illustrate how it is relevant to their own schools and lives. The next section, *Why deliver LEANS?* says more on why we think learning about neurodiversity is important.

When we say LEANS is a **resource pack**, we mean that the components form a **curriculum** for introducing neurodiversity and reflecting on its impacts in a primary school context. LEANS is designed to be delivered **in full and in a certain order**, with concepts building from unit to unit. The resource items are integrated with each other and with an overarching narrative.

LEANS is organised into seven units (Table 2), each one covering a main topic area. Each unit has its own section in this handbook (**Part 4**).

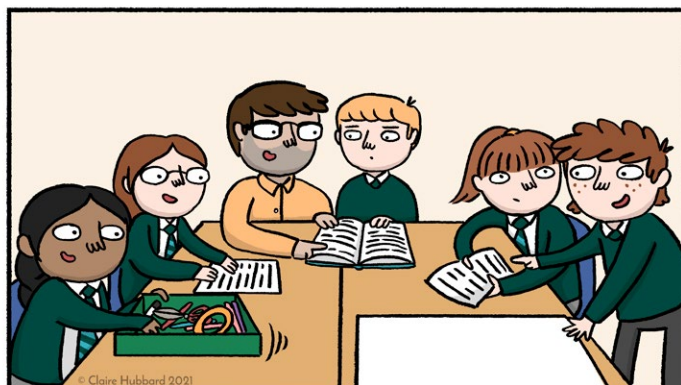


Table 2 The LEANS units and their main topics

Unit	Main topics
1. Introduction to neurodiversity	• Neurodiversity concepts and terminology
2. Learning and thinking differently	• Variability of experiences with lessons and the physical school environment
3. Communication and understanding	• Communication modalities and situations; miscommunication
4. Getting along together at school	• Understanding differences between needs and wants; conflicting needs • Offering and accepting help
5. Is that fair?	• Equality and equity-based concepts of fairness • Applying fairness concepts to classroom supports, treatment at school
6. Different ways to make a friendship	• Friendship, relationships with classmates
7. Neurodiversity in our classroom	• This unit is about review, reflection, and planning toward the future.

What's in the units?

Each of the seven units is organised around **Key Points**, which are the **learning objectives** for that unit. For example,

Key Point 7. Even when my class all does the same activity, other people are not always having the same experience that I am⁴.

LEANS uses multiple types of resources to engage with the Key Points and to explore how they impact people's lives. Table 3 (next page) summarises the types of LEANS resource items and how they complement each other. You'll read about resource types in more detail in **Part 3, section 1**.

⁴ Key points appear at the start of each unit, and the full list is in Appendix B.

Using **fictional characters and situations** across the resource items is an important tool: it allows LEANS to be specific, without putting real pupils on the spot to share personal information. We think that type of personal disclosure poses a potential risk, especially to marginalised pupils—you will read more about this in the safety planning section in **Part 3**.

Table 3 Types of LEANS resource items and what the resource pack provides to support their delivery

Type	Resource purpose	What we provide
Explainer videos	A didactic resource that directly explains tricky new vocabulary and concepts that recur throughout LEANS, in child-friendly language.	• Delivery instructions in handbook • Links to videos (hosted online) • Downloadable video scripts
Activities	Hands-on exploration of Key Points, usually combined with class discussion or reflective elements. Activities vary in format and may include games, problem-solving tasks, or art. Some are explicitly noted as warm-ups or reflections on other content.	• Delivery instructions in handbook <i>Activities may also include:</i> • Printable teacher guides • Printable pupil instructions or materials • PowerPoint slides
Stories	Provide multiple perspectives on Key Points. Illustrate how Points can apply in daily life, using experiences from a fictional neurodiverse classroom.	• Delivery instructions in handbook • Story text with teacher notes • PowerPoint slides with story illustrations
Posters	There is one poster per unit. A reminder of central unit ideas, but not a complete summary.	• A3 and A4 printable files (PDF)

Where did LEANS come from?

This resource pack was developed by a team of **researchers** working with an **educator participatory design** team. This team was made up of experienced education professionals from the UK nations and Ireland. The LEANS teams were a neurodiverse group, meaning that they brought lived experience of neurodiversity issues as well as their professional knowledge to the development. Together, both teams set the goals for LEANS, identified the topics it should cover, and decided on the type of materials and instructions we would need to create for pupils and teachers. All the instructions and materials in LEANS were created from scratch for this curriculum.

Later in the development process, draft LEANS materials were reviewed by additional educators and members of neurodiversity communities. Based on their feedback, we made adjustments to the materials to ensure that the content would be accessible, easy to deliver in class, and beneficial. The LEANS resource pack was also **evaluated** in four Scottish mainstream primary schools in 2021, to test how well it was performing as a neurodiversity teaching tool, and how feasible it was in real classrooms.

You can find a more detailed description of LEANS development and evaluation in Appendix A. The full credits for our team and many other people involved in the project can be found in **Appendix C**.

1.1.2 Why deliver LEANS?

Lack of acceptance and understanding can cause harm

Young people with additional support and educational needs too-often experience a **range of negative outcomes** such as bullying and mental ill health. According to research, harmful stereotypes and poor understanding from others play contributing roles in these disadvantages. LEANS is one way to tackle poor understanding, stereotypes, and stigma in school communities. *You will read more about these issues in **Part 1, section 1.2**, on impacts of LEANS.*

Talking about “lack of understanding” sounds vague, but can have wide effects. Many neurodiversity-related differences at school unfold in mundane situations—like one child protesting the unfairness of another “getting” to do something attractive, like taking extra breaks, or not “having” to follow the same rules. **Neurodiversity can help us explain why things are the way they are in the school context, in a way that avoids blaming individuals, or labelling them as deficient, incapable, or “not trying”.** What people think and do and say in many of these small, everyday situations really matters for overall school experiences, and continues affecting people later in life.

LEANS' big-picture goals: change what people know, think and do

The LEANS curriculum is guided by three goals: **know-think-do**. The aim is for participating pupils and staff to...

- **KNOW:** Increase their **knowledge** of neurodiversity terms and concepts.
- **THINK:** Develop more positive **attitudes** towards neurodiversity and neurodivergence.
- **DO:** Increase individuals' positive and inclusive **actions** within the school community.

Targeting factual knowledge alone is unlikely to result in positive changes.

For these reasons, LEANS includes built-in reflective opportunities throughout, as well as points where all individuals (or the whole class) are asked to explicitly consider positive changes they could make. Changes don't need to be dramatic in order to have benefit. When so much school experience is shaped by small, everyday interactions, it can make a big difference if people choose...

- To be patient when others need more time to do something or give an answer.
- To ask, if they're not sure what someone else means.
- Not to whisper or make fun of someone's mistake, when they might have before.
- Not to say "unfair!" or demand an explanation, if they see someone getting "extra" support.

All of the LEANS content is intended to work toward the high-level **know-think-do** goals, with the different types of resources playing complementary roles. *You will read more about this in **Part 3, Section 1**.*

**Think LEANS is what you're looking for?
Double-check our list of FAQs before going on...**

We know that people have different expectations for what a neurodiversity teaching resource will do. To be extra clear about what the LEANS resource is and who it's for, we've put together a quick guide (see box) that lists some misconceptions of what the LEANS resource is, and explains what it's *really* like instead. Delivering LEANS is a time investment, so please check that it's really what you're looking for.



What the LEANS resource pack is, and isn't!

X A one-off activity or event.	✓ LEANS is cohesive curriculum with a progression of ideas and content across units. It is designed to be delivered <i>over one term</i> or longer, setting the class up to apply and reflect on this idea over time.
X A “pick n’ mix” collection of stand-alone neurodiversity activities and tools.	✓ The LEANS materials are a set, designed for delivery in a certain order. Many will make little sense out of-sequence! This handbook explains why we discourage people from picking and mixing.
X A neuroscience teaching resource.	✓ For pupils, LEANS is light on brains and neurons. It does discuss <i>information processing</i> throughout, but focuses on people’s experiences.
X A skills programme or intervention for children who are struggling socially or academically.	✓ LEANS is designed for whole-class delivery, to upskill everyone about what neurodiversity is. It does not teach study skills or interpersonal skills—and tries to be minimally prescriptive about the “right” things to do.
X A programme that trains teachers or gives “top tips” on how to teach neurodivergent pupils.	✓ In the teacher-facing materials, LEANS gives a grounding on neurodiversity terms and concepts, and discusses how to teach about this topic sensitively and successfully.
X An anti-bullying programme for schools.	✓ LEANS talks about how our actions can impact others, but is <i>not suitable</i> as an anti-bullying tool. We’d encourage you to seek a dedicated programme.

What the LEANS resource pack is, and isn't, continued

X A tool to tackle school exclusions, or anxiety around school attendance.	✓ While LEANS seeks to increase accepting attitudes and actions in the school environment, it's not a silver bullet. It was not designed to address these situations.
X Only for children with diagnoses of conditions like dyslexia, ADHD, Tourette's, or autism.	✓ LEANS is not a psychoeducation programme, and doesn't give lists of facts about diagnoses. It discusses a range of experiences, including people <i>without</i> diagnoses.
X A diagnostic tool, to something that encourages people to identify themselves or others as neurodivergent.	✓ LEANS is not a diagnostic tool. It does not encourage participating people to label themselves or others, or include activities that ask people to do this. It <i>does</i> encourage people to think of themselves as members of neurodiverse <i>groups</i>.
X The right choice in every classroom.	✓ Classrooms need to individually assess their suitability for LEANS. Our self-evaluation exercise in Part 1, section 2 can help you do this.

1.1.3 Where should we deliver LEANS?

LEANS is designed for **whole-class delivery** in mainstream primary schools, to children ages 8-11.

Delivering neurodiversity teaching *only* to children with diagnoses or known support needs would be like teaching about cultural diversity *only* to children who are from minority groups in your community. This is not to say that they would already know everything—but those lessons could effect

far greater changes in perspective for children from *majority* groups, and be more likely to increase respect and acceptance in the classroom. Your school and class are neurodiverse, meaning that everyone is part of neurodiversity and it will affect their daily lives. Whole-class neurodiversity teaching sends the message that **it is everyone's business to understand and respect brain-based differences, and to make the school community an accepting place.**

The LEANS resource pack was designed to cover a range of perspectives and be **relevant for all members of your class.** That includes people with diagnoses, with known special educational needs (e.g. ASN, SEND, ALN), those who have diagnosed family members, or people who may feel different or be struggling and don't know why. It also was designed for children who don't fall into *any* of these groups—but who may make up a significant proportion of your class!

This last group is an essential audience for LEANS, because differences in learning, thinking, feeling, and overall school experiences may not yet be on their radar. Our LEANS story character Jack is in this group, and he finds out some surprising things over the course of the stories—even about his best friend!

What about other ages and types of schools?

LEANS was designed to be appropriate and appealing for children aged 8-11. This is a period where children are growing in confidence, self-efficacy, and understanding of their own strengths and challenges. Friendships and other peer relationships are becoming increasingly important. Children are developing the attitudes they take forward into adolescence—and secondary school.



If most of your class is working below an 8-year-old level, or is in the 8-11 age range but has many pupils not yet proficient in English, you would need to make major adaptations to the LEANS materials to meet their needs. At such a level of changes, you would no longer be delivering the *LEANS curriculum*, but something else. That matters because neurodiversity is a sensitive topic, where exact terminology is important. It's also a topic where there may be an existing burden of stigma, confusion, and misinformation. Substantial adaptations—or simplification—runs the risk of misinforming pupils, or accidentally re-introducing subtle but negative messaging about differences.

1.1.4 Who should deliver LEANS?

LEANS needs to be delivered by a **qualified primary teacher**, who is the **main teacher for the participating class**. It is not appropriate for delivery by student teachers, teaching assistants/learning support assistants, or short-term supply teachers (i.e. substitute teachers).

Do I need to be a neurodiversity expert to deliver LEANS?

No, you don't! These resources don't assume any detailed neurodiversity knowledge. **Our goal is for this handbook to include everything you need to feel confident delivering the LEANS content—even if neurodiversity is a new topic for you.** We hope that the initial parts of the handbook can help give you a grounding in this neurodiversity terms and concepts, and orient you to safety issues that you will need to keep in mind.

We know that many schools have qualified teachers who aren't class teachers—for example, people in inclusion-focused roles. While they may also be experienced and know pupils well, **we strongly recommend delivery by class teachers, not other staff**. It may sound attractive to have a school 'LEANS specialist' who learns the content and delivers the curriculum across multiple classes. However, we think that model of delivery increases some of the risks involved in teaching about neurodiversity, especially after LEANS curriculum delivery finishes.

Why do we say it's so important for class teachers to deliver LEANS?

1. **Class teachers know their pupils best**, which is important for self-evaluation (Part 1 section 2), and for monitoring how people are feel and interact during *and after* delivering the curriculum.
2. **Class teachers are likely to be the staff member that children know best**, and the one who is most readily available to answer tricky questions.
3. **LEANS introduces neurodiversity ideas and vocabulary, but the issues are long-term**. Children will continue reflecting, making connections, and asking questions over time—and their class teacher will still be there to help.
4. **Another staff member coming in to deliver LEANS implicitly marks neurodiversity as separate**, and undermines the central message that it relates to *everything we do at school*, and is part of the classroom's daily business and interactions.

I have a co-teacher. Can we deliver LEANS?

Yes! We'd encourage **both people** to be actively involved in preparing and delivering LEANS, for the same reason we encourage class teachers to lead this curriculum (rather than other staff).

We realise joint delivery may not be practical. If only one teacher will deliver LEANS content, it's important that the other also:

- Understands the neurodiversity background information and ethical considerations around this topic (**Parts 2 and 3** of the handbook).
- Collaborates on the pre-delivery **safety planning**. Either teacher might need to field those situations with pupils or parents, without any notice—before, during, or after LEANS. See **Part 3, section 3**.

Both teachers are models, whose actions will shape pupils' opinions and beliefs about neurodiversity and neurodivergence. Saying that the other teacher is "in charge of LEANS" or that you can't answer their neurodiversity questions sends a message in itself!

Finally, under this section on "who should deliver LEANS?" perhaps the most important answer is people who have a respectful and accepting attitude toward differences—whether you are just learning about neurodiversity yourself, or are already an expert. Pupils will learn as much from how you act, as they do directly from LEANS!



1.1.5 When should I deliver LEANS, and how long will it take?

Preparation time

We want to stress that delivering LEANS safely and successfully requires an up-front time investment for staff. As we've said before, the handbook provides a "training course in a book" and we encourage you to set aside 6-8 hours to work through it. That time is for developing your understanding of neurodiversity concepts, and getting to grips with how the programme works and what it covers. Once you have that knowledge, delivering LEANS in subsequent years will need far less preparation time.

The first and most essential step is to complete a **self-evaluation** about the practicalities and risk of delivering LEANS in your class. LEANS will not be the right choice everywhere, right now. We strongly encourage you **not** to invest lots of preparation time, until you are sure it will be a suitable choice.

Classroom delivery time

Based on input from experienced teachers, we estimate that it will take between 15-19 hours of classroom time to deliver the full LEANS curriculum. We recommend dividing this content over one or more terms within the same school year. That works out to spending 1-2 hours a week on your neurodiversity topic over one term⁵.

Based on our evaluation study in 2021, it's quite challenging to deliver LEANS over a shorter time period than one school term, and doing that may feel like a lot for you or your pupils. Again, LEANS is a whole curriculum, and not suitable as a one-off event.

LEANS' seven units vary in size and complexity. The average unit delivery time is estimated at just over 2 hours per unit. There is no need to deliver a whole unit in one go, and the instructions don't assume you will do this! Each unit contains multiple resource items, and we provide delivery time estimates for each item so that you can schedule the content as best fits your class.

See the Unit Reference section at the start of Part 4, for more details about the delivery time estimates.

⁵ Those estimates assume a class size of approximately 25 pupils, and that LEANS is prepared and delivered by one teacher (without the help of a teaching assistant or other staff). They also assume a school term of 12-13 weeks.

One unit doesn't equal one lesson!

There are seven LEANS units, each covering a major topic. As you start to plan, please remember that **one unit does not equal one lesson period**.

- Each unit will require more than one lesson period to deliver, assuming a school lesson of approximately 50 minutes.
- Units are not all the same length. The average estimated unit delivery time is about **2 hours**, but this ranges from 80 minutes-3 hours per unit.

For the greatest flexibility, we give estimated delivery times for each individual resource item (e.g. each activity, each story). You can then schedule the content in the way that best fits your class.

1.2 How might LEANS impact your class?

Unsurprisingly, we can't offer exact answers about how the LEANS programme may impact your class—classes will all be different, not least because they will bring in different knowledge and experiences at the start. What *we can* offer is...

1. The potential benefits of teaching about neurodiversity, in general.
2. Connections between the LEANS curriculum and existing school curricula and quality indicators (*focused on UK school systems*).
3. How LEANS performed as a teaching tool and how pupils and teachers reacted, during our 2021 evaluation study in schools.



We might sound like a broken record, but...

As we've said throughout the introduction, LEANS *won't* be an ethical choice for all circumstances and school settings—the **self-evaluation exercise** in the next section (**Part 1, section 2**) can help you judge the risks in your own setting. All classes should complete one before deciding to adopt LEANS.

1.2.1 Broader impacts of teaching about neurodiversity

Combatting stigma with knowledge and acceptance

The existence of neurodiversity is a fact about humans, the way that diversity of language, culture, and beliefs are facts. That's important, but not a very compelling reason to add it to an already-crowded curriculum!

By thinking about our differences through the lens of neurodiversity, we can promote acceptance, understanding, and equality of opportunity for all children, but particularly those with documented or undocumented additional support needs (Scotland), special educational needs and disabilities (England, NI), or additional learning needs (Wales). They are a sizeable and growing proportion of all school pupils—as you may know perfectly well from your own classroom.

Social media and the news consistently draw our attention to stories of children in these groups who are struggling with school, or experiencing a pattern of negative life events as they mature and try to navigate the world. **Academic research strongly indicates that these are not regrettable exceptions, but part of widespread patterns.** Based on research, pupils with learning difficulties experience a range of negative outcomes including bullying [1]⁶, poor mental health [2-3] and school exclusion [4]. These experiences necessarily prevent them from thriving in education [5]. It is evident that harmful stereotypes and lack of understanding play a key role in these disadvantages. For example, there is a growing evidence base indicating that people with learning differences are poorly understood [6-8] including by themselves [9], and this has been related directly to poor mental health outcomes including suicidality [10]. In autism, for example, we know that people are often judged harshly on minimal evidence by non-autistic raters [11] including by children [12].

The news is not all bad: there is also a strong evidence base that we can fight stigma by increasing people's knowledge [e.g. 13]. This has also been shown specifically in schools, even over a short period [14].

Broadly, this is the strategy that LEANS takes: informing people about neurodiversity and neurodivergence to fight negative, stigmatising beliefs and actions. We're doing that at school—the locations and communities where children spend most of their time.

⁶ See References, beginning page 235.



Neurodiversity helps us explain things

Neurodiversity concepts and vocabulary are **useful tools in everyday school interactions**. These can help us explain why things are the way they are, especially in common but friction-causing school situations, for example those where some pupils appear to be treated differently than others, and peers may not know why.

The concept of neurodiversity can help us to...

- **Normalise that *everyone* has things they need at school.** Many pupils may have theirs met by how school processes and environments usually work, rendering those needs effectively invisible and rarely discussed. "Needs" isn't code for something extra or unusual.
- **Answer pupils' difficult questions** when there appear to be varying rules, expectations, or privileges across pupils. For example, arguments about fairness and unfairness! Reminding pupils about the general concept of differing needs is also an answer that *doesn't* reveal personal information about individuals (such as diagnoses).
- Provide **alternate, non-blaming narratives** to explain why people do and experience things differently, without suggesting individuals are deficient, at fault, or "not trying".
- Reflect on **diverse personal experiences of school settings, learning, and relationships** (for example through videos or fiction).

For both children and staff, neurodiversity can also give us *all* new tools when it comes to making sense of what we (and others) are doing—and the explanations we give as to why. Moving away from narratives of exceptionalism and personal blame *also* help the larger cause of greater understanding and acceptance.

1.2.2 Linking neurodiversity to school curricula and quality indicators

We recognise that you are under a lot of pressure to adhere to curriculum guidelines and meet inspection goals, and these will be different under different education systems. *Neurodiversity* may be a new term to many educators and schools. However, teaching about information processing differences and their impacts has close connections to existing school priorities and curriculum topics across the UK nations.

Some connections are to do with neurodiversity as a *topic*, but others to do with what neurodiversity teaching could *achieve* in the school community—along the lines of the LEANS **think** and **do** goals! For example, furthering inclusion and wellbeing agendas by addressing intolerant or stigmatizing attitudes, as discussed in the prior section.

In Figure 1, we want to show a little of how this neurodiversity resource might link to skills (in **blue**), topics (in **yellow**) and principles (in **grey**) that you are already covering with your class.

For example, neurodiversity links to **topic-based learning** like citizenship, or health and wellbeing. Learning about neurodiversity can also help with **skills development**, such as encouraging pupils to think about what makes them effective learners, and to practise self-advocacy skills in asking for help. It is relevant to becoming an ethical community member and confident learner. The activities and the very concept of neurodiversity should also align with some fundamental principles and core purposes of our education system, like **inclusion** and **human rights**.

Neurodiversity is one of the many dimensions of **diversity**. You may already discuss other dimensions in class, like ethnic, religious or gender diversity. Understanding the different ways in which we experience the world, due to our neurodiverse brains, is part of a bigger conversation about the ways in which we are different, and the same. These conversations can foster children's well-being, self-confidence and sense of belonging; develop a sense of personal responsibility; and promote children's self-awareness and understanding.



Learning about neurodiversity with LEANS might also help you meet key **quality indicators** or achieve **core purposes** for your school inspection and evaluation process. For example, you can link this exercise with your ability to **implement reasonable adjustments** as a school, to promote personal development and to have a positive impact on behaviours and attitudes.

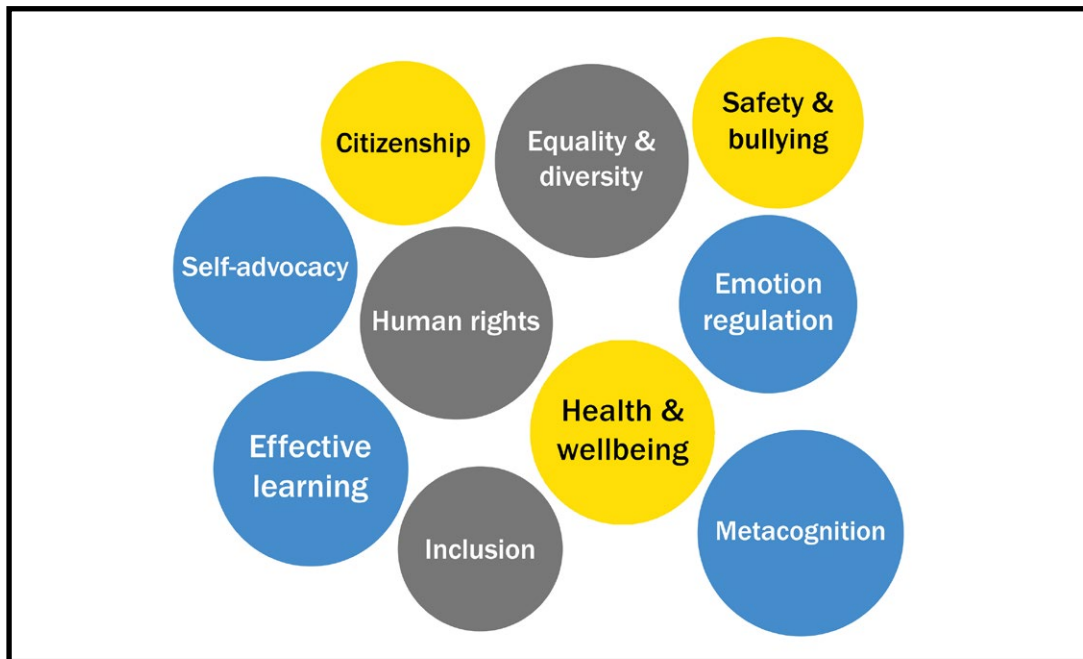


Figure 1 Links between LEANS and school curricula

1.2.3 Evidence from the LEANS evaluation study

In 2021, four mainstream Scottish primary schools participated in an evaluation of the LEANS programme, with teachers delivering it in their classrooms⁷.

The two big goals of the study were:

1. To test LEANS as a neurodiversity teaching tool. Would children who participated be able to show knowledge of neurodiversity? Would their attitudes or intended actions change?
2. To test whether LEANS resources were usable and practical in real classrooms.

Pupils in the participating classes took a pre-test quiz before encountering any LEANS content, and later post-test quizzes. The multiple-choice quiz data was supplemented by interviews with some child participants, in addition to free-response quiz questions

⁷ Each phase of the LEANS project has received approval from the ethics committee at the Moray House School of Education and Sport (University of Edinburgh).

asking for feedback. We gathered unit-by-unit “diary” feedback from participating teachers, as a key source to assess feasibility and identify needed revisions.

Highlights from the LEANS evaluation in schools

- LEANS was tested in four Scottish schools in 2021, delivered by qualified teachers.
- Seven classes with 139 children completed LEANS, with 62 of these formally enrolled in the study (parent/carer permission for data sharing with researchers). Classes were P5-P7, with an average child age of 9.84 years.
- **Attitudes and intended actions:** Before and after LEANS, children completed a quiz about their attitudes and intended actions at school. After LEANS, *more* children endorsed courses of action (or made judgements about school situations) that aligned with the accepting and inclusive principles in LEANS, to an extent unlikely to be due to chance.
- **Defining neurodiversity:** Before LEANS, **17.7%** of study participants chose the correct definition of neurodiversity in a multiple choice question, slightly worse than chance. After LEANS, **59.7%** were able to choose the correct definition, an increase of 42%!
- **Neurodiversity facts:** On a post-LEANS neurodiversity knowledge questionnaire, children got an average of 63.5% correct answers, far exceeding the level of chance.
- **Pupil opinion questions:** 81% of participants agreed with the statement “I learned new things from the LEANS activities and stories.” 90% of participants agreed “I think other schools should do LEANS too.”

We used evaluation study results and feedback from teachers and pupils to revise the resources, and reach the final version released to the public.

What did children and teachers think of LEANS?

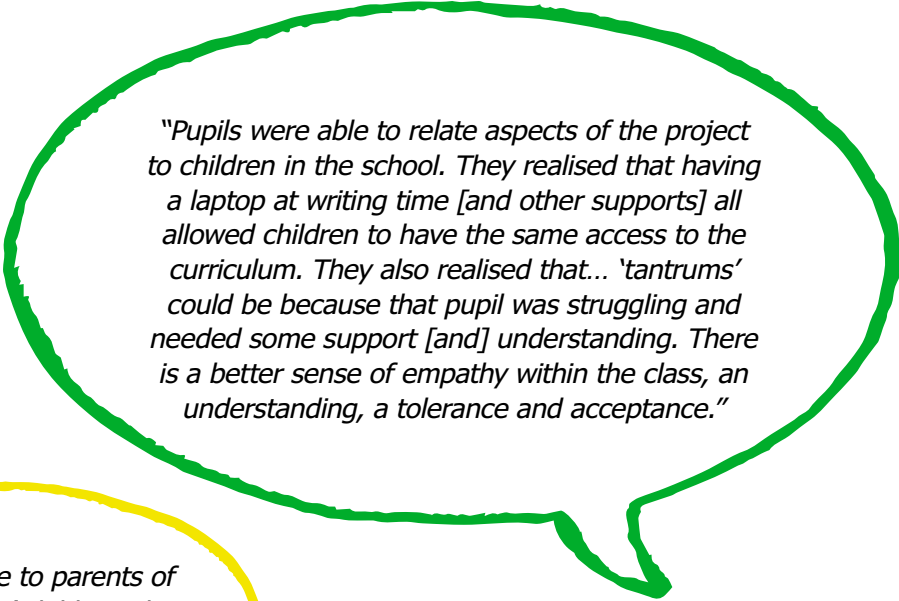
Following their classes’ completion of LEANS, we **interviewed** seven children across three of our schools. Interviews were a completely optional component of the study, and prioritised children with additional support needs. A thematic analysis of their experiences of LEANS indicated that they found the experience fun, and it was covering new content. One explained, “*I had heard of [neurodiversity] before, I just didn’t exactly know what it meant.*” We found no evidence of upset amongst the interviewed children who had taken part. Critically, they considered it a ‘regular’ part of their school experience. LEANS did not stand out as unusual or separate from other topics they covered. This is very important, given issues about diversity and inclusion topics too-often being presented as separate, or concerning some people and not others.

The interviews also showed convincing evidence that participating children had taken on board key messages about differences between people relating to neurodiversity and individual LEANS topics, and were changing their views. One child reflected that “*if I treat everyone the same way it could be unfair*” (LEANS encourages equity-based

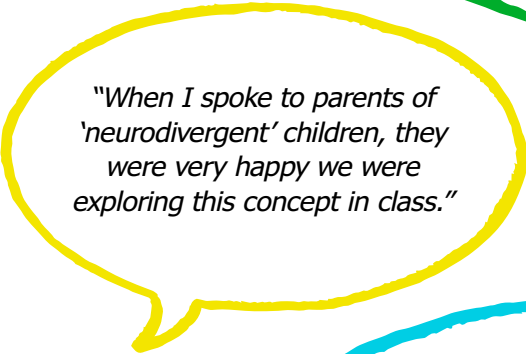
approaches to fairness). On communication, another *"learned that not everything needs to be said with words."* Another participant summarised their LEANS learning by explaining that *"everyone is different and that you don't have to be the same as everyone else... you can just be you"*.

In the **teacher diaries**, we received many valuable suggestions about simplifying and improving the handbook and the stories. These have been fed into the final versions you see now.

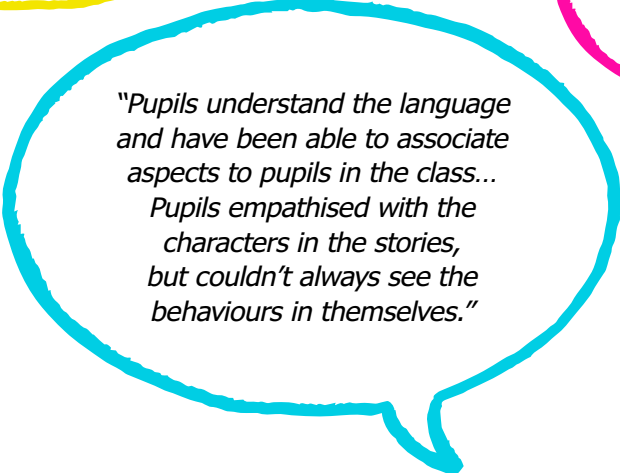
Asked to reflect on the **perceived impacts** of LEANS in their classes, here are some thoughts that the evaluation study teachers shared:



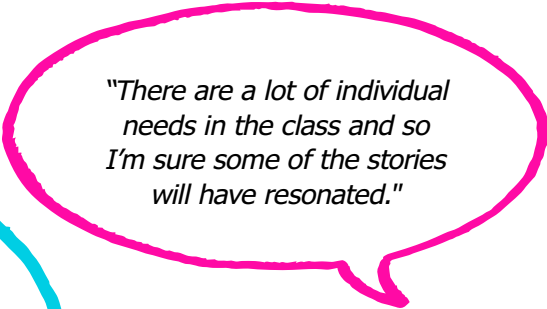
"Pupils were able to relate aspects of the project to children in the school. They realised that having a laptop at writing time [and other supports] all allowed children to have the same access to the curriculum. They also realised that... 'tantrums' could be because that pupil was struggling and needed some support [and] understanding. There is a better sense of empathy within the class, an understanding, a tolerance and acceptance."



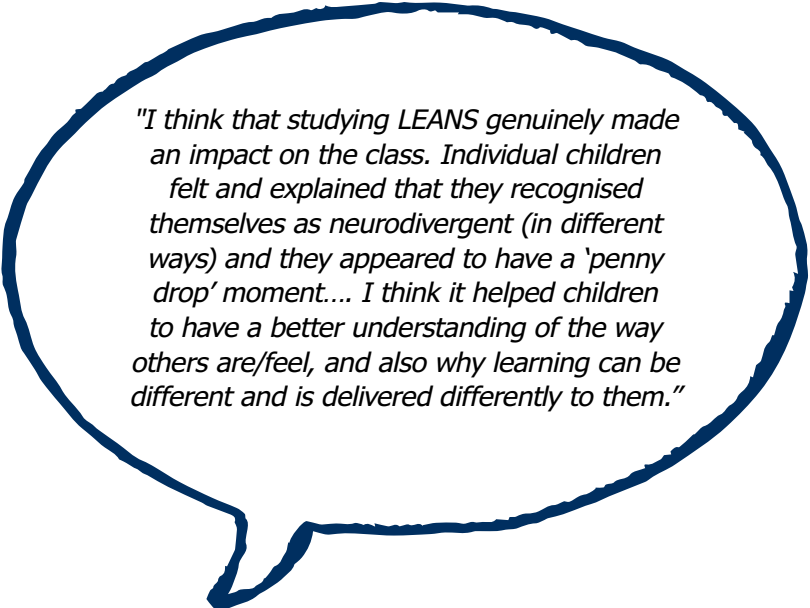
"When I spoke to parents of 'neurodivergent' children, they were very happy we were exploring this concept in class."



"Pupils understand the language and have been able to associate aspects to pupils in the class... Pupils empathised with the characters in the stories, but couldn't always see the behaviours in themselves."



"There are a lot of individual needs in the class and so I'm sure some of the stories will have resonated."



"I think that studying LEANS genuinely made an impact on the class. Individual children felt and explained that they recognised themselves as neurodivergent (in different ways) and they appeared to have a 'penny drop' moment.... I think it helped children to have a better understanding of the way others are/feel, and also why learning can be different and is delivered differently to them."



"It has been a great resource where pupils have enjoyed the activities."

Overall, teacher comments suggested that there were some important connections and insights in their classes, but also **more learning to do in the future**. For example, several teachers pointed to examples of their pupils' incomplete understanding of the content—like pupils understanding needs as important but still wanting their own needs to come before others, or "[*empathising*] with the characters in the stories, but [*not always seeing*] the behaviours in themselves." This unevenness makes sense: children's development and understanding will always vary across a class, and LEANS is one step in a longer path towards improving understanding and acceptance at school.

Looking for the evaluation study details?

Appendix A, "How LEANS was created" has more information on our evaluation study, written with educators in mind. If you're keen to see all the numbers, tables, and statistical tests, please check the LEANS resource website for information and links to full evaluation study reporting as it becomes available.

Now please go on to section 2, Self evaluation.



2. Self evaluation: is LEANS is right for your class, right now?



Please complete the self-evaluation even if you already feel confident that LEANS would work well in your class—there may be factors you have not yet considered. If you have already delivered LEANS in a previous year, we would encourage you to please self-evaluate again for your new class.

2.1 What is the self-evaluation, and why do it?

Teaching diversity-related topics or sensitive social issues is never completely risk-free. In addition to the potential for offense, there may be potential for harm—we are, after all, discussing real people’s lives. We believe that the risks related to delivering LEANS are broadly in line with teaching other topics that are already better-established in schools. However, there are some risks specific to neurodiversity as a topic:

- People using their neurodiversity knowledge to hurt others in the school community (intentionally or unintentionally).
- People feeling distressed as a result of thinking and talking about neurodiversity.
- Increasing (instead of decreasing) marginalisation of neurodivergent people, and negative attitudes toward this group.⁸

Before going on, we would strongly encourage you to **pause and reflect** on how LEANS may fit (or not fit) with your class and school’s circumstances, and what the likely effects of delivering it may be. **Delivering LEANS may not be the right choice—a practical and ethical choice—for your classroom, right now.**

⁸ We discuss these risks in more detail and give examples as part of Part 3, section 3 on safety planning.

When might LEANS be a good fit for a particular classroom? Some key features would be...

- A qualified teacher can prepare and deliver the LEANS curriculum in full during the same school year, and substantially as designed. This person should be the class's main teacher.
- In general, the class's pupils and staff treat each other with respect and consideration. The class and school do not have patterns of bullying amongst pupils or staff.
- Pupils have had prior experience with talking about diversity and/or socially sensitive topics at school, and staff feel comfortable discussing these topics too.

The resource is not recommended for pupil cohorts who would be unable to access it without major amendments (e.g. younger age groups, classes with a large numbers of English language learners).

To help you reflect, we have provided a structured self-evaluation questionnaire with 18 yes/no questions about characteristics and circumstances that might support LEANS delivery, or represent elevated risks (also available as a separate downloadable sheet).

Who should do a LEANS self-evaluation?

The self-assessment should be completed by the class teacher. If your school ultimately decides that a different member of class should deliver LEANS, we still think it is essential for the class teacher to be involved in the initial evaluation, as they know their class best.

If multiple classes at your school are considering LEANS, each one needs a separate evaluation.



2.2 LEANS self-evaluation exercise

Please consider whether each of the following 18 statements applies to your school or classroom, and answer YES, NO, or NOT SURE.

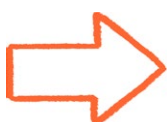
Part A: Delivery requirements for the LEANS curriculum

Practical delivery requirements	Yes	No	Not sure
1. Teacher availability: Are you the main teacher for the class where you are thinking about delivering LEANS, and are you fully qualified? (i.e. not a short-term supply teacher ⁹ , student teacher, or non-qualified teacher)?			
2. Preparation time: Can you can commit time to up-front time preparation for delivering LEANS, plus classroom content preparation as you go along? <i>General preparation will take more time if you are new to neurodiversity as a topic.</i>			
3. Delivery time: Can your class commit an estimated 15-19 hours of classroom time in the same school year (ideally in the same term) to deliver the core LEANS resources in order and in full?			
4. Pupils' level of work: This resource is aimed at children with literacy and interpersonal skills of age 8+. Are the majority of children in your class working at or above that standard?			
5. Pupils' English language: Are the majority of the children in your class proficient at speaking and reading in English?			
6. Whole class delivery: Would the whole class participate in LEANS together (not only delivering to a particular subgroup of pupils)?			

⁹ A substitute teacher (USA).

Every item in this section is an essential delivery requirement for the LEANS curriculum. If you have said NO to any items, we would encourage you **not** to deliver LEANS in your class at this time.

Items 4 and 5 are essential because if your class is working below an 8-year-old level, or has many pupils not yet proficient in English, you would need to make major adaptations to the LEANS materials to meet their needs. At such a level of changes, you are no longer delivering LEANS as a curriculum.

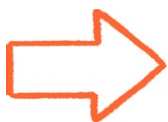


If you have said YES to all the delivery requirements, please go to part B.

Part B: Bullying

Patterns of bullying in your class	Yes	No	Not sure
7. Pupils: In your class, is there a pattern of pupils bullying one another, or being bullied by staff?			
8. Staff: In your school, is there a pattern of staff members bullying one another, or being bullied by pupils?			

No class or school likes to acknowledge that there is bullying amongst pupils or staff. We sincerely believe that patterns of bullying mean LEANS poses elevated risks in your class, especially to neurodivergent pupils and staff (diagnosed or not). A little neurodiversity knowledge could be a dangerous thing: effectively, ammunition for bullies who are already alert to differences.



If you have said NO to both questions, that patterns of bullying aren't present, please continue to the final self-evaluation section (C).

Part C: Characteristics of your school, staff, and pupils

School characteristics	Yes	No	Not sure
9. Support from leadership: Does your school's leadership support teaching about neurodiversity?			
10. Attitudes to difference: Overall, do you think your school community sends pupils a message that it is acceptable for them to be different from one another? (e.g. different personal characteristics, backgrounds, skills, ideas?) ¹⁰			
Staff characteristics	Yes	No	Not sure
11. Teaching: Within your class, do you and the adults with whom pupils are regularly in contact feel comfortable talking about diversity and socially sensitive topics ?			
12. Safeguarding: Are you familiar with your school's safeguarding policies?			
13. Self-expression: Is it important to you that children are allowed to express themselves in your class?			
14. Staff interaction: In general, are members of the school staff considerate and supportive of one another?			

¹⁰ The purpose of this question is less about pro-difference messages, then about the absence of strong messages that certain characteristics, skills, ideas are "good" or valuable, and others are not.

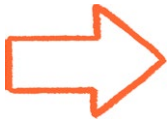
Your class and their experiences	Yes	No	Not sure
15. Mixing: In your class, do different pupils tend to mix and work well together?			
16. Pupil interaction: In general, are members of your class considerate and supportive of one another?			
17. Diversity topics: This year or in a past year, have the pupils in your class completed any diversity-related topics? (For example, about cultural or religious diversity, disabilities, or LGBTQ+ communities?)			
18. Discussing sensitive topics: This year or in past years, have the pupils in your class had practise discussing sensitive social or personal issues as part of the curriculum?			
Please now count your number of YES, NO, and NOT SURE answers in section C. We do not expect that any school will say YES to all items in this section, and that is not a requirement to deliver LEANS!			

A note about “sensitive topics” in the self-evaluation items (9, 16)

We’re aware that what counts as “sensitive” varies across communities and age groups. We ask you to consider pupils’ past experience with these topics in school because LEANS exposes pupils to sensitive information. This will be safer and more successful for everyone if pupils have practised these skills before, and if staff feel comfortable—or at least, willing—to discuss tricky topics.

Please consider whether your class has had opportunities to practise respectfully *discussing* (not just reading about) subjects where people may have strongly held values or beliefs, or where they may find the topics uncomfortable or embarrassing. Some examples might be discussing religious beliefs, or taking part in sex and relationships education.

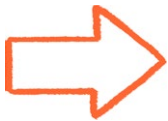
If the answer is no, LEANS might not be an easy first experience. You might want to schedule LEANS *after* your class has worked on another topic.



**If you have mostly YES answers
in section C:**

We think LEANS will be a good fit for your class. It sounds like your circumstances are likely to support delivering LEANS in a way that minimises risks for pupils and staff.

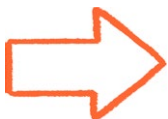
If you have answered I DON'T KNOW to any items, we would still encourage you to follow up and seek more information.



If you have mostly NO answers in section C:

We would encourage you not to deliver LEANS in your class at this time, as it could be difficult to do this safely. LEANS may pose more risks to pupils and staff in your class than it would in a class with different circumstances.

If you don't do LEANS but you're still keen to get your class thinking about neurodiversity, the list of crowdsourced resource suggestions on the LEANS website has books and materials for pupils and teachers, and may be a place to start.



**If you have mixed answers in section C
(YES, NO, and NOT SURE):**

We would encourage you to **reflect further** before making any decision on LEANS. In addition to the structured yes/no questions, please consider **potential problems and problem-solving** in your setting:

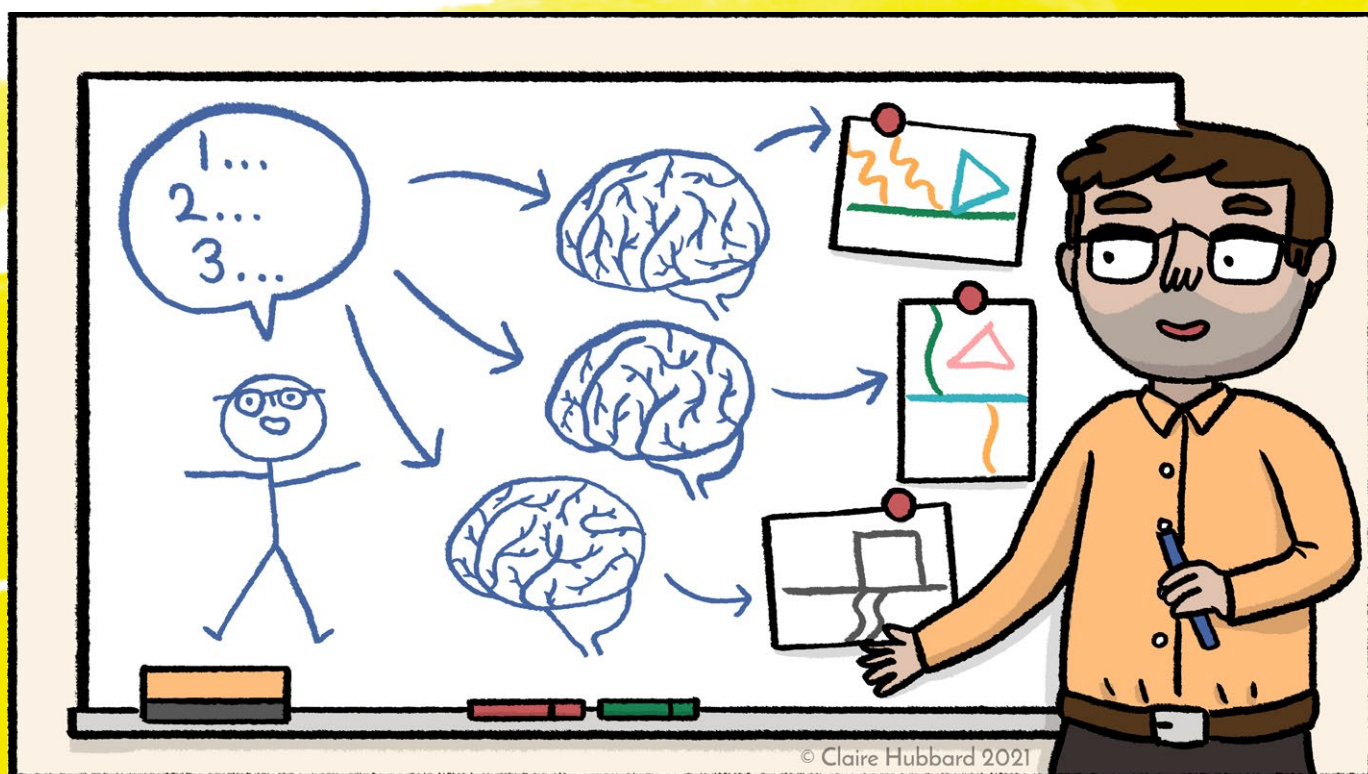
- Are there any problems that seem *likely* to arise from talking about neurodiversity in your class?
- Who might these problems affect, and how serious would they be they? Would they particularly affect pupils or staff who are already struggling or marginalised?
- How well-prepared are pupils and staff to address those problems if they happen—or to address unexpected problems?

If you feel that there are few likely problems, and/or that staff and pupils are particularly well-prepared to address them, LEANS could still be an ethical and practical choice in your class.



Part 2

A teacher's guide to neurodiversity



About Part 2

We know that teachers delivering LEANS will have **varying levels of neurodiversity experience**—maybe extensive, maybe none! Similarly, you may or may not have any background in brains.

This part of the handbook is meant to help you feel prepared to teach this topic and use its vocabulary, and to understand how it fits together with terms you may already know, like ASN, SEND, or ALN. Keep in mind that it's a topic introduction, not a full account of current thinking on neurodiversity.

Even if you are familiar with neurodiversity already, we would encourage you to read Part 2, to make sure that we are using the terms and concepts in the same way you expect.

1. What is neurodiversity?

The main purpose of the LEANS resource pack is to convey the concepts of **neurodiversity** and **neurodivergence** to children. It's therefore important that we first establish a clear definition of these words for you and link them to other related terminology used in schools. We hope this glossary helps with that process. The following section will help you to brush up on some terminology about brains, such as **information processing**.

Person-first language: Before we define neurodiversity itself, we want to share a note on person-first language. Person first language, like "person with dyslexia" is often promoted as best practice when referring to specific diagnostic and/or disability groups. However, many people from those groups now prefer **identify-first language**, like "dyslexic person". The reasons for this are many and varied, and we will not attempt to do justice to them here!



As a general guide, when talking to, or about, a specific individual we should always try to use the language that they prefer for themselves. In our materials, we may use a mix of person-first and identity-first language to reflect the different perspectives in the communities we're talking about.

1.1 Neurodiversity vocabulary

Neurodiversity: Neurodiversity is the fact that all human beings vary in the way our brains work. We take in information in different ways, we process it in different ways, and thus we behave in different ways. Like other types of diversity, neurodiversity is about the presence of variation (in this case, information processing) within a *group* or *population* of people; it's not a property of individuals.

Neurodiversity doesn't just explain how each individual person is different from the next in terms of their information processing. We can also use neurodiversity to understand bigger differences between types of people, that may be labelled by a diagnosis. Such **categorical differences** in brain processes, and therefore in experience and behavior, underpin diagnostic labels such as autism, ADHD, developmental language disorder, dyslexia or dyspraxia.

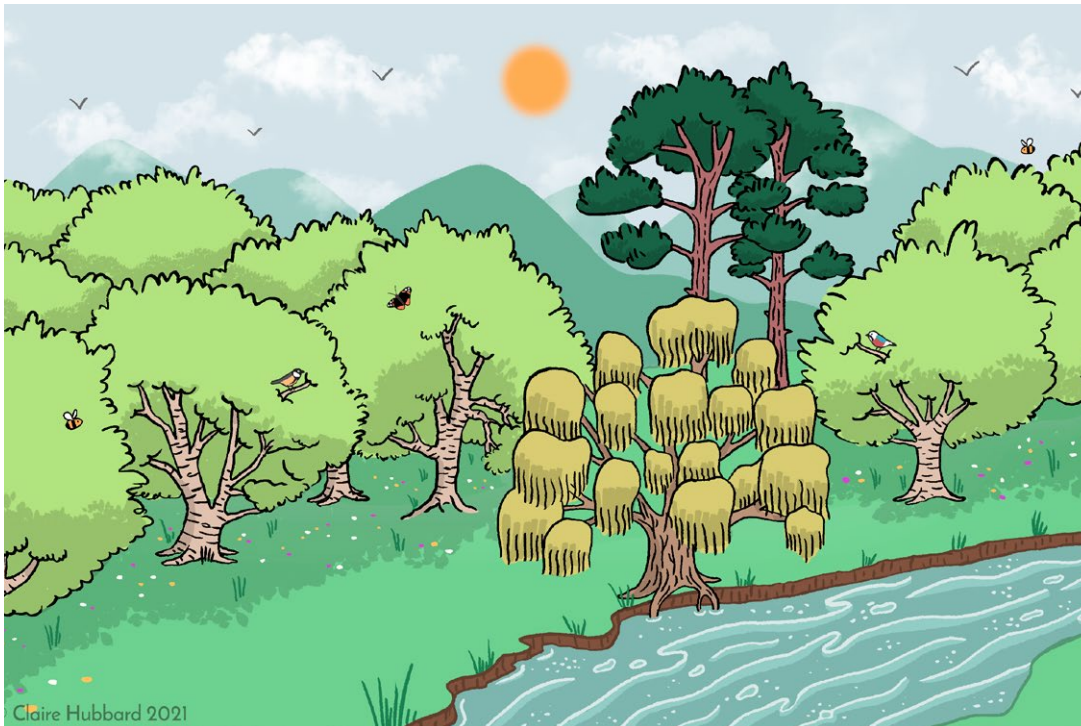
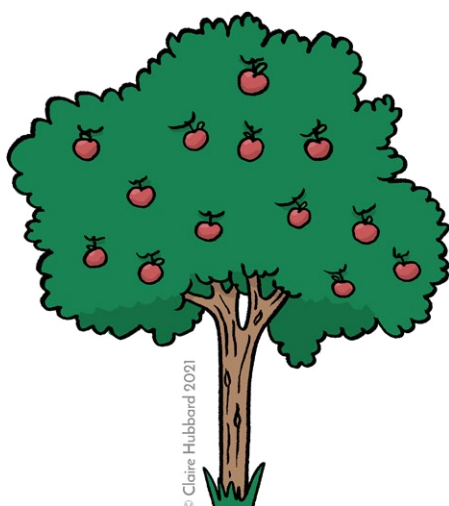


Figure 2 Illustrating neurodiversity with a woodland metaphor (from video resource 1.3)

Let's consider trees as a metaphor for brains (Figure 2). Every single tree in a woodland has its own pattern of growth and is different and unique from its neighbours. However, it's also possible to **categorise** trees—pines, oaks, willows, apples—and these categories indicate consistent, larger differences. Sometimes differences are really obvious, like when we compare a palm tree and an oak tree. Sometimes they are subtle, and easy to miss. These differences are not only about their appearance, but the types of **environmental conditions** that they need to thrive.¹¹

¹¹ We use a woodland metaphor to help explain the concept of neurodiversity and at school for pupils, and how the same environment might meet some needs well—and others not so well. This is part of the neurodiversity explainer video (see Unit 1, resource 1.3).



Neurotypical: We can use the word neurotypical to describe people who seem to form the majority of the population. Their brains are individually different, of course, but they seem to work in a roughly similar way. Neurotypical people can more easily thrive at school because the way we teach is often implicitly set-up for them.

Neurodivergent: While there are differences between neurotypical people, but some people may find they that are “*more different*” – as one autistic seven-year-old described herself.

We can use the word **neurodivergent** to describe these people. Their information processing may differ substantially from the neurotypical majority, and might result in a need for adjustments at school, or in other parts of life.

Autistic, dyslexic and dyspraxic people as well as people with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), developmental language disorder (DLD) or Tourette’s syndrome could all be described as neurodivergent. There isn’t one “official” definition of neurodivergence and the types of differences it encompasses. Some definitions or lists may be much broader than this! At the time of writing, different communities vary in how much they might use (or like) the term neurodivergent, and individuals may or may not choose to describe themselves in that way.

Right now, we don’t know exactly how many people are neurodivergent, or in what ways. Estimates vary widely and there are no absolutely robust statistics, but a commonly-accepted estimate based on school support data from the UK nations is that 15-20% of children are neurodivergent¹². Some of them may have one or more of the diagnoses listed above. Others may not have a diagnosis yet – or ever in their lives. In these materials, we won’t talk much about specific diagnoses. Instead, we want to get your pupils thinking about neurodiversity as a whole.

¹² <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england>

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/summary-statistics-schools-scotland/pages/5/>
See also: *supplementary tables*.

Neurodiverse: An individual alone cannot be neurodiverse, but **a group of people may be neurodiverse** if the members of the group belong to different categories. Being in a minority within a group doesn't make a person diverse, because diversity is a property of the group as a whole. In the same way, biodiversity refers to variation between living things – a panda is not diverse on its own, even though it is rare, and nor is a rabbit. A group of rabbits and pandas and squirrels and rhinoceroses would be diverse. We can assume that every classroom in the UK is a neurodiverse classroom because it will include different neurotypes – whether or not anyone in the class has a specific diagnosis.

By using the language of neurodiversity – the fact that we are all different and this affects our school experience and learning – we hope to move away from stigmatizing language, and emphasize inclusion instead.

We want to help your pupils feel like a rich and complex community of learners who all have different things to offer, and who can confidently ask for help when they need it. The fact that some people have brains that are “more different” should not prevent them from being a valued part of their class.

1.2 Focusing on experiences over diagnostic labels

While neurodiversity concepts are reaching a wider audience and appearing more often in education spaces, they aren't always used in a clear or consistent way. Here are some big misconceptions:

Neurodiversity is not:

1. A collective term for a list of labels or diagnoses. It's a bigger idea than that. People with labels like “dyslexia” are only one part of neurodiversity.
2. A term that only refers to people who are visibly different, struggling, or unhappy. Neurodiversity is about our human similarities as well as our differences, and it's also about contentment, success, and joy.
3. A synonym for SEND, ASN, ALN, or any other related terms used where you are. *This is discussed in the next section.*

The biggest reason that these aren't accurate ways to talk about “neurodiversity” is that neurodiversity includes everyone. It's a characteristic of a group, and will include

people who don't have any labels, and who think and learn in ways that are similar to many other people (i.e. neurotypical). It also includes neurodivergent people who are safe and fulfilled in their daily lives.

An important way that we emphasise these points within LEANS is through the **stories**. The fictional classroom is obviously a neurodiverse group. As the stories follow the class, they showcase a range of experiences, including pupils who are neurotypical and find school a good fit, pupils who are noticeably different but unlabelled, and neurodivergent characters enjoying things and finding success. *All* those experiences are part of the neurodiverse whole.

An important principle of LEANS is that it **focuses on experiences** throughout—both positive and negative—rather than **diagnostic labels** (such as dyslexia, ADHD, developmental coordination disorder/dyspraxia, dyscalculia, or autism). Labels are mentioned in the stories because these are how some characters have had differences explained to them previously, or because they are actively trying to make sense of their own diagnoses right now. However, labels aren't a main focus of LEANS.



LEANS' focus on experiences does not mean that any of the activities attempt to simulate neurodivergence, or show "what it is like" to be neurodivergent, dyslexic, and so on. The activities *do* try illustrate larger points about differences in our experiences, which are ultimately rooted in our diverse neurology.

Pupils or others may *assume* that the purpose of some activities is simulation or "showing what it's like." We would encourage you to correct these assumptions if you hear them.

The lack of emphasis on diagnostic labels in LEANS doesn't mean they won't come up in the classroom, especially if you have pupils with any of these diagnoses. If labels come up during class activities, it can be a good time to remind everyone that neurodiversity is not a synonym for any one label—or a list of diagnostic labels.

1.3 What's the relationship between neurodiversity and terms like ASN, ALN or SEND?

Neurodivergent children might be described as having **additional support needs** (in Scotland), **additional learning needs** (in Wales), **special educational needs** (in the rest of the UK), or **learning disabilities** (in the USA). As *neurodiversity* and *neurodivergent* become more familiar and widely used terms, there's understandable confusion about how these relate to all the existing categories.

"Neurodivergent" is not a direct synonym for categories like ASN, ALN, SEND, or learning disabilities. Neurodivergent children and young people can fall within those categories. However, they also include children who *aren't neurodivergent*, and need support for other reasons.

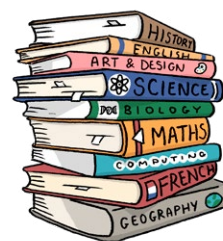
These terms all cover a wide range of circumstances and needs, many of which are *not related* to neurodiversity or neurodevelopmental conditions. For example, the Additional Support Needs label (Scotland) also applies to things like visual impairments, physical disabilities, children with English as an additional language, or children in the care of the local authority¹³. So, it's not correct to equate ASN, SEND, etc. with neurodivergence.

Another issue with these terms is that many neurodivergent children **don't have formal diagnoses or educational plans** – and may not know that they are neurodivergent!

They may or may not be counted under these categories during primary school. Some of those pupils may be coping well now without specific supports, but might require extra supports or seek diagnoses later as demands on them increase (e.g. in secondary school or higher education).

Want more about neurodiversity?

Part 5, section 2 has a list of **further reading suggestions** for teachers who are new to neurodiversity, and those who already have more familiarity with the topic.



¹³ <https://education.gov.scot/parentzone/additional-support/what-are-additional-support-needs/>

2. A primer on brains and information processing

2.1 What does the brain do?

Brains are amazing! They control and coordinate all conscious and unconscious activity. Your brain is in charge of learning, communication, memory, movements, but also creativity, personality, behaviour, and emotions (Figure 3). All the cognition and behaviour that makes us “us” is based in the brain. Understanding the brain helps us to better understand ourselves and those around us. Put it simply, the brain analyses incoming information (like sensory information), and decides how to respond (for example by making muscles move).

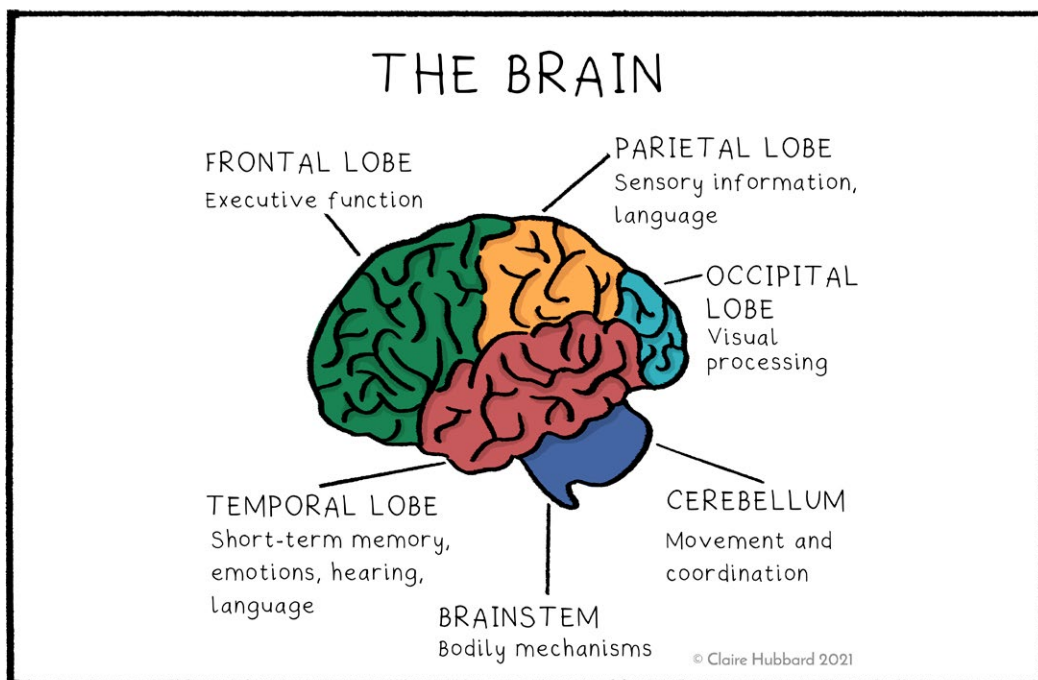


Figure 3 Main functions in different parts of the brain.

What kind of information are we talking about? There is sensory information, like sounds or vision, but also many more types of information: language, memories, even hunger.

Did you know? There are many more than 5 senses. On top of the 5 famous ones, we also have *nociception* (the feeling of pain), *proprioception* (knowing where our limbs are in space and feeling of our own body), balance, coordination, temperature, heart rate, feeling of space, passage of time, or even the pressure of the air in our lungs. Sensory information (including these less-known senses such as pain or time perception) is a big part of life, and the way they are processed is slightly different in everybody. Neurodivergent experiences at school or in daily life commonly include differences in sensory processing.

What does the brain do with this information? The brain processes information coming from outside (like sounds) and inside the body (like heart rate) in dedicated brain areas. For example, auditory information arrives from the ear directly into the part of the brain next to the temples. Then the brain makes sense of it all by using mental processes and mechanisms (this is called *cognition*). Some parts of the brain are in charge of directing a flashlight onto specific information (*attention*) while ignoring others (*inhibition*). Other parts select relevant information, combine it all together, and use it to understand and produce language, or to recognise the face of someone we love, or to solve a problem. Under the brain is the cerebellum, essential for movements and balance, and the brainstem, essential for bodily mechanisms like digestion. All these mechanisms that seem like a single task are actually the result of many parts of the brain each processing a bit of information, then passing it on to a different part of the brain that puts it all together.

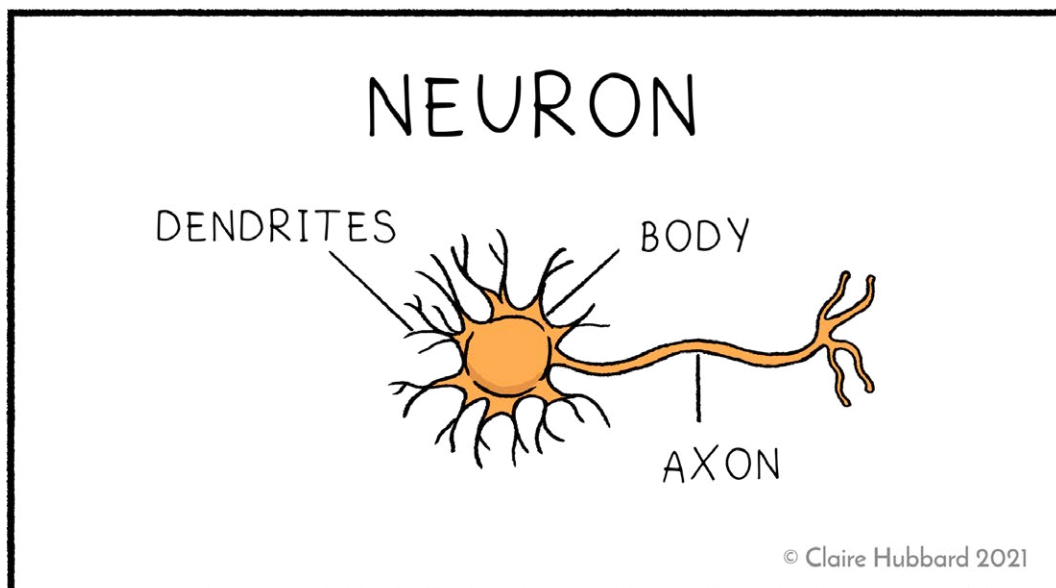


Figure 4 Parts of a neuron

Wait, what does “processing” even mean? The brain is made up of brain cells called neurons, (Figure 4) that have a large body, several short thin arms (dendrites), and one long (sometimes dozens of centimetres long!) thick arm (an axon). Neurons constantly send information (in the form of electronic signals) to each other, even from opposite sides of the brain, thanks to connections between the dendrites and axons. The way each brain processes information depends on the connections and networks that exist within itself. Thanks to this constant communication between neurons, the brain controls and coordinates aspects of our cognition, perception, emotion, and behaviours, as you can see in the thalamus example, on the next page.

Did you know? The brain has its own doorkeeper, like at a fancy hotel. Deep inside the brain there is a region called the *thalamus*, that is like the “doorkeeper” of the brain: it receives the sensory information from the body and sends it to the appropriate brain area for processing. It also decides what sensory information goes to processing, and what remains unconscious. For example, activity **1.1** asks children to choose their preference between a series of silly options, like “*Would you rather do your homework while smelling a mouldy cheese or while wearing a scratchy jumper?*” This type of processing involves the thalamus. We are all different in the way the thalamus filters information: some people can have more difficulty than others in ignoring certain sensory information, such as smells or touch.



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Example of the thalamus in action: Listening to a song we love

When we listen to a song we love, the sounds first arrive in the *thalamus*, a region that knows where to send each sensory information. It directs the sound information to the brain area that deciphers sound signals. Then the information is sent to the different brain areas that understand that the sound is language, and the areas that understand that there is a melody. These areas communicate with each other to understand that the sound is a song. Neurons dealing with memory also get involved, as it is a song we know, as well as neurons dealing with emotions, as it is a song we love. If we feel like it, this neuron network will also communicate with neurons in charge of producing language and in charge of moving muscles, and we will start singing along. All that thanks to neurons sending each other electric signals!

Will I need to teach my class all this brain information?

No. LEANS’ pupil-facing content is light on neurons and brain facts. It is not a neuroscience teaching resource.

With respect to brains, the most important concept is **information processing**, as an underlying explanation for some of our differences. Even there, LEANS doesn’t talk about processing in terms of neurons, but in terms of stressing how many things our brain controls—it’s not just “thinking”, but also our feelings, moving our bodies, and more. Information processing is happening all the time with no holidays—that’s why processing differences (that sound so abstract) can have such far-reaching effects in our daily lives.

2.2 Tackling 4 famous neuro-myths

“We only use 10% of our brain, imagine what we could do if we used 100%”

No, we use all of our brains, 24 hours a day. Thanks to techniques like functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), we can look at brains in action! We can see how different parts of the brain are used for different tasks; we can see how different parts of the brain are connected and communicate with each other.

“The brain stops changing after childhood.”

No. Brains are particularly responsive to their environment during childhood (hence the crucial role of education in shaping the developing brain), but actually brains continue to evolve throughout life based on what we learn and experience. When we learn something, even as adults, it creates new connections between neurons. That is how the brain adapts. When we go through long periods of deep stress, it changes the way the brain works. All our experiences throughout life change our brains, even if only a tiny bit. This is neuroplasticity: our brains' ability to be responsive to its environment: life and learning experiences create new connections between neurons, strengthen or reorganise existing networks, or prune the superfluous connections in our brain.

“Right-brained people are creative and left-brained people are logical.”

No, people are not right-brained or left-brained, and there's no link between our behaviour/aptitudes and a dominant side of the brain. Some processes use one hemisphere more than the other. For example, while key language areas such as *Broca's area* (for producing speech) and *Wernicke's area* (for comprehending speech) are located fully in the left hemisphere, other processes use both hemispheres. Importantly, our behaviour is the result of the activity of our entire brain, and it is not dominated by one hemisphere. We are all different and we all like different things, but that has nothing to do with dominant brain hemisphere.

“Everyone has a different learning style which means they learn best from a specific type of content”

No, people do not have a fixed 'learning style' and everyone can learn from all sorts of materials. There's no such thing as a “kinaesthetic learner” or “visual learner” and so on, and multiple studies have shown this – students don't especially improve if material is matched to their supposed learning style.

There are lots of reasons why people might sometimes appear to prefer a particular type of content when they learn. First, changing things up can re-energise, or re-focus attention. If you've been writing a lot, it's often a good idea to do some speaking or moving around next. Second, some kinds of information are suited to specific learning "modalities" – for example, it's hard to learn music without using our hearing. But if someone is good at music, that doesn't mean they are an "auditory learner" and can't learn well in other ways too. Third, experiencing new information in many different ways – written, spoken, enacted, drawn – can help us comprehend it more fully. Presenting content in varied ways is a great idea, but we should avoid the myth that each person has a rigid and specific learning style which is the only one that works for them.

Looking for more brain content?

- Try visiting the [Neuro-Myths in the classroom](#) page on the Frontiers for Young Minds website, part of a larger collection of free neuroscience articles called "[Everything you and your teachers need to know about the learning brain](#)".
- The Centre for Educational Neuroscience at the University of London hosts a brief overview of how the brain works, written for a general audience and based on recent research <http://howthebrainworks.science/>.
- Quiz yourself! The Centre for Educational Neuroscience also hosts a range of other teacher articles and links, including "Neuro-hit or neuro-myth?" <http://www.educationalneuroscience.org.uk/resources/neuromyth-or-neurofact/>



Part 3

Preparing to deliver **LEANS** in your class



1. How is the LEANS resource content structured, and why?

1.1 Key Points are explained, explored, and illustrated in resource items

What are Key Points?

The LEANS neurodiversity curriculum was developed as a *package* of content, intended to be used together. The 23 **Key Points** are the “skeleton” structuring the LEANS curriculum, and form a precis of its main ideas. Here are some examples:

KP 1. Neurodiversity means that we are all different in how we think, feel, and learn, because our brains process information differently. Neurodiversity includes everyone, because everyone has a brain!

KP 18. There are many ways to be a good friend or classmate. We can also be different in the types of friendships we want to have. The same things may not be equally important to every person.

Key Points are like **learning objectives**¹⁴. Individual points are deliberately simple and abstract. The resources—activities, videos, stories—put some flesh on the Key Points skeleton, and interpret neurodiversity ideas in a way more specific to primary schools and primary-aged pupils.

Before preparing to deliver LEANS, it’s useful to know more about the **types of resource items** you will see later in the handbook, and how they play different roles toward the big-picture **know-think-do goals** described in the introduction. Figure 5 summarises how three main types of resource items (videos, activities, and stories) but work with the Key Points in complementary ways.

Videos directly explain Key Point content

Video explanation of Key Points focuses on new or tricky vocabulary that is heavily used across the resource pack, and helps make sure that you and your pupils are on the same page about these terms. These are the most didactic part of the LEANS resource.

¹⁴ Key Points appear at the start of each unit, and a full list is in Appendix B.

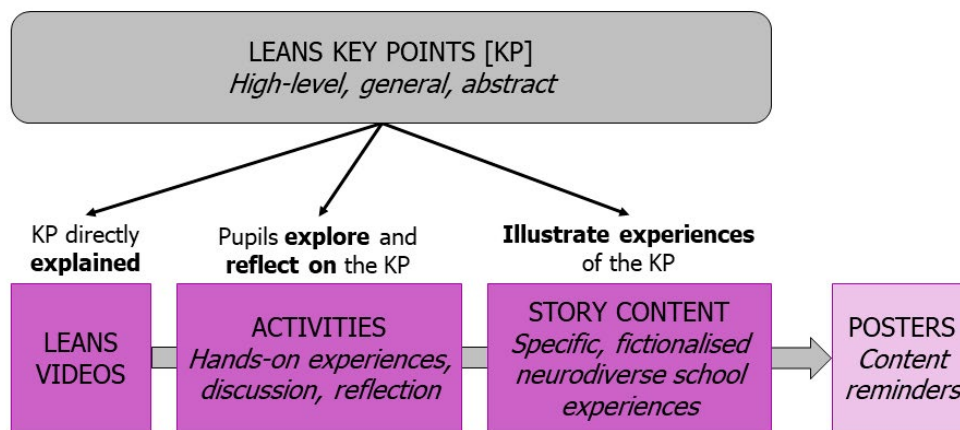


Figure 5 Relationship between the LEANS Key Points and resource item types

Activities explore and reflect on Key Points

Pupils use **hands-on activities and discussions** (all referred to as activities in the handbook) to **explore** the Key Points and see them in practice. Activities help make the Key Points and terminology “real”—*we saw that in our class, I did that myself*. They give pupils direct experience with abstract Key Point ideas, and a **shared frame of reference** to discuss them.

The LEANS activities tend to operate at a level of whole-class experience (e.g. seeing that everyone creates a unique drawing in activity **2.1**) or private reflections. We’re concerned about not singling anyone out, a safety issue discussed further in Part 3, section 3.

Stories show how Key Points apply in people’s lives

Activities are integrated with **stories** about a fictional, neurodiverse classroom of pupils, who are also doing a LEANS-like programme. The characters represent a range of experiences, strengths, and challenges, and different diagnostic statuses (neurodivergent, differences but no diagnosis, and neurotypical). *See beginning of Part 4 (Unit Reference), for more about the LEANS characters and an overview of our story arc.*

The **story content** serves to **illustrate multiple, particular perspectives and experiences**, as complement to the more generic Key Points. The stories push pupils to consider what those Key Points can mean for people’s lives—and how kaleidoscopically varied those meanings may be. Remembering that “*Neurodivergent*

people are different from each other" [KP3] lacks the impact of contrasting how characters Morag, Ibrahim, and Simon fare in class and with their peers.



Deliberately, the stories are written in the hope that every pupil will say "sounds familiar!" at some points, and be genuinely surprised in others. For example, one child in our LEANS evaluation study shared surprise about the character of Rashida, who "always wanted to go and get it right" and was anxious in an art activity about not knowing the answers.

"The experiences and reactions of some of the neurodivergent characters resonate deeply with my younger self and I have been left with a strong impression that the LEANS resource gets to the absolute heart of what it means to grow up with a different brain-wiring..."

—Sarah Douglas, LEANS educator design team

Stories aren't about repetition

The purpose of the stories within LEANS is not to make doubly sure the class “gets” the high-level Key Points and could list them on a quiz. The stories’ focus on perspective, daily-life examples, and empathy are an essential tool for reaching the LEANS curriculum’s **think** and **do** goals: shifts in people’s attitudes and actions.

Classroom posters (optional) do repeat some of the essential ideas in each unit. They’re meant to jog your class’s memory—but aren’t a stand-alone teaching tool. See “About LEANS unit posters”, at the start of Part 4.

1.2 Each LEANS units addresses a main idea

To make LEANS easier to understand and deliver, LEANS’ Key Points are grouped into **seven units**. Each unit focuses on 1-2 **main ideas** (topics), with later units building directly on the vocabulary and content of the earlier ones. *Table 2 (page 15) listed the LEANS units in order, and their topics.*

The items in each unit **complement** each other in support of the topics and Key Points. They do not simply repeat each other! For example, in Unit 2 (“Learning and thinking differently”), pupils do a drawing activity that helps demonstrates how members of the class are processing information differently. Post-activity discussion picks up and applies the neurodiversity terms directly defined in the Unit 1 video. The Unit 2 stories then describe a wider range of information processing examples, and let us zoom in and hear what different pupils are thinking and feeling as they get through PE, English, and a drawing task of their own.

Each unit has its own **section of the handbook** in Part 4, with an **entry** for each constituent item. In addition to the resource information in the LEANS teacher handbook (this document), there is a **downloadable package of materials**, primarily organised by unit. All of the stories for Units 1-7 are collected in a single document, referred to in Part 4 as the **LEANS story booklet**. Individual stories are clearly labeled with their unit and resource item number (e.g. Story **4.1**).

2. Recommended delivery and making changes

LEANS' recommended delivery in a nutshell

- Delivered by a qualified teacher, who is the **main classroom teacher**. See Part 1.1.4, "Who should deliver LEANS?"
- **Self-evaluation exercise** indicates LEANS likely to be low-risk in your class. *Complete this exercise in Part 1, section 2.*
- **Safety planning** is in place, and all classroom staff know the plans. See Part 3, section 3.
- Delivering teacher has **reviewed the whole handbook** before beginning delivery.
- **Whole class** participates in LEANS. See Part 1.1.3, "Where should we deliver LEANS?"
- **Units are delivered in full and in order**, over 1+ school terms of the same year. See Part 1.1.1, "What is the LEANS resource pack?" and "When should we deliver LEANS?"
- LEANS activities and participation are **not marked/graded**.
- **Minor adaptations** to fit your context are OK (explained further in this section).
- Please respect our **terms of use**, especially if adapting the resource!

The handbook introduction already covered main issues around how LEANS is intended to be delivered. This section provides **general guidance** on approaching the delivery, then expanded information about **why we discourage you from marking LEANS activities or participation**, and about **adaptation**. We have said the resource should be delivered in order and in full—so what kind of adaptation is suitable, and why?

Closely related are the **LEANS terms of use and licensing information**. This section helps explain them in plain English, and gives examples of what is and isn't allowed.

2.1 General guidance

2.1.1 Setting boundaries and shaping expectations: three recommendations

Teaching about neurodiversity will be a sensitive topic for many pupils in the class. They may know they are neurodivergent already (even if they don't use that word), or may have a family member who is. They may be feeling different, or be struggling with some aspects of school, but not know why. Other pupils may at first feel neurodiversity is not relevant to them and there is the potential for them to be bored by the content, or even make fun of it. The goal, then, is to engage everyone with neurodiversity and help them see it as relevant, without undesirably singling anyone out¹⁵.

We know that, as a teacher, you are already skilled at engaging pupils and handling difficult conversations. In case they are useful, here are three general recommendations to help maximise the beneficial impact of this resource.

Recommendation 1: Set ground rules before delivering any LEANS activities, and revisit them as you go on.

You might already have a contract or behaviour agreement with your class, and this could be a good time to bring it out. Key items you might want to add, or emphasise, include:

- Respect each other, listen without judging.
- People are the experts about their own experiences and feelings. It's important to believe them, even when our experiences are different.
- Share your own experiences if you want to, but don't speak about others in the class.
- Remember you can ask me questions, and talk to me after class in private, if you want to.

If you are delivering LEANS over a long time, such as over the whole school year, you will almost certainly need to revisit your ground rules over time. Some activity instructions suggest supplementary rules to help things run smoothly and stay respectful.

¹⁵ Singling out (and not singling out) is a big issue for LEANS, and we discuss that more fully in Part 3, section 3.2.

Recommendation 2: Communicate that many parts of LEANS are ambiguous. Encourage acceptance of (and comfort with) ambiguity.

It may help pupils to know in advance that most parts of LEANS will be more like studying a poem than doing a math problem. There is new topic information that has "right answers", such as the definitions of new vocabulary. The rest, like in a poetry lesson, has room for multiple interpretations—some of which will be more constructive or use information better than do others. It isn't a complete free-for-all!

When pupils are working on collective problem solving or engaging with activities where they need to think about others' feelings or motivations, they may press to know the answers. Depending on your class, it may be worth managing expectations about whether or not there is ONE right answer they are trying to find. That uncertainty ("*is there an answer?*") may be particularly stressful for some of your neurodivergent pupils, or anxious pupils who already worry about falling short or getting things wrong.

During LEANS activities, the real "right answer" may be understanding the presence of multiple solutions or viewpoints, or acknowledging that we can't definitively know about others' feelings, motivations, or struggles. We may need to work out those situations one at a time, trying to make them acceptable to the people involved.

Recommendation 3: Encourage collective problem-solving

During some parts of LEANS, pupils may raise difficult questions such as what they should do in a specific, challenging situation. Some activities, such as the "school scenarios" in resource **4.2** or "Ripple effects" in **7.3** explicitly ask pupils to consider these types of questions.

One goal of neurodiversity teaching is to recognise that we all have things to contribute, and unique ways of seeing the world. Rather than attempting to definitively solve these problems, you can reflect the question back out to the class to see what the different perceptions of the situation might be, and what solutions are generated. The variety of opinions will be, in itself, an example of neurodiversity at work as different pupils think different actions would be more or less helpful in a given scenario. Pupils may not definitively "solve" anything, but are practicing important skills for how to approach this type of problem and consider the options.

2.1.2 Story delivery

LEANS stories are central to the curriculum, and may include discussion questions to help check the class's comprehension, apply new vocabulary, and reflect on new ideas. All of the stories have illustrations (as part of the Unit PowerPoints), to be displayed while you read the text in the LEANS story booklet.

Throughout LEANS, we recommend that teachers read the stories aloud to their whole class.

We've made this recommendation after carefully considering the alternatives. **We think that other possible delivery methods pose problems for classes around timing/pacing, and children's comprehension.** For example, reading the stories individually during class time may mean you have to go on before the slowest readers are able to finish. Assigning stories as homework means some children may not read them at all, causing knock-on problems for participating in other parts of the content. Reading together addresses these pacing issues, includes everyone, and gives you an opportunity to address comprehension issues as you go.



2.2 Why not assess LEANS work or participation?

When we recommend against assessing LEANS, we are thinking of marked tests and quizzes, marked homework, or marking what individuals/groups do on the LEANS activities. We think this isn't a productive choice because...

1. Neurodiversity may be a very new topic for most pupils, and perhaps a confusing or uncomfortable one. We want to encourage pupils to volunteer ideas, experiment and explore the issues freely. It's harder and riskier to do that if you know you are being assessed. Other pupils may not feel comfortable contributing much, because it feels very personal for them.
2. As noted above, much of LEANS is ambiguous, situational, and about interpretation. It has few universally right answers, which poses problems for assessment!
3. Assessed work or participation marks might disproportionately affect your neurodivergent pupils, or those who are anxious or low in confidence. They may be particularly stressed about getting things wrong here—or potentially, sharing too much about themselves.

If you do intend to assign homework related to LEANS, we'd also ask you to think carefully before choosing items that would need to be scored or assessed. Instead, it might be an opportunity for children to explore other books, comics, or videos related to LEANS topics, or to respond through a creative medium.

2.3 How much can I change or adapt these materials?

In one sentence: minor adjustments are likely to be OK and we've provided editable files to help you do this, but we discourage major amendments or cuts. The format and goals of individual resource items vary in their flexibility, and thus how much they can be adapted.

2.3.1 General guidance on changes

In developing LEANS, we have tried hard to enable edits that relate to delivering LEANS in a safe and ethical way. One of these is being able to **change character names or discussion scenarios that are "too close" to real people or situations in your class**. You should be able to edit the LEANS materials to address these issues.

Other simple edits to make the material more relevant or easily understood are also no problem. For example, you might swap in regional terms that are more familiar to pupils.

We discourage major amendments to the content. What types of things do we mean by that?

- Changing the definitions of core terminology
- Cutting whole units or types of resources (e.g. cut Unit 6, cut all the videos)
- Cutting core activities or stories (i.e. those that are **not** marked as optional)
- Changing the order of the units
- Substantially editing or cutting the stories

As we have said throughout, **the LEANS content has been designed for delivery in sequence, and in full**. We know that teachers are capable of planning their own lessons and adapting things to fit their classes. However, we encourage you to follow

this order and deliver all the core content (everything not marked as optional). The pieces of content are integrated with one another (e.g. a story helping to make sense of the activity your class just completed), and build another across units, referring back to earlier concepts and plot points.

If you choose to use resource items individually as part of your lessons, you will not be delivering the LEANS programme and you should not expect the same results.

2.3.2 Flexibility rating symbols

These symbols indicate how much the different resource items can be adapted while still supporting the Key Points and LEANS goals. The main drivers in assigning flexibility ratings were:

- How closely integrated is this item with other items?
- How sensitive is this item? As in, is there risk (or is it likely to confuse people) if it's not done in a certain way?
- Would it still support the learning goals if pupils do something related, but different?

There are three “traffic light” ratings, shown in Figure 6:

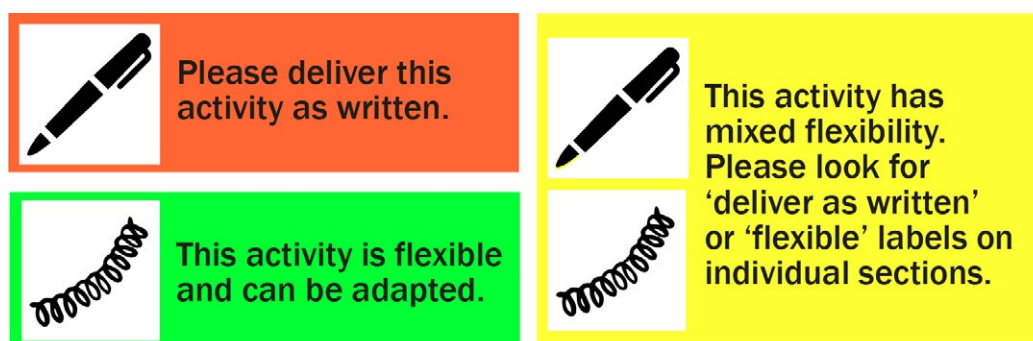


Figure 6 Flexibility rating symbols and colour-coding for LEANS activities

Orange: please deliver this activity as written

The greatest number of activities are orange. Orange-marked activities should be delivered as closely as possible to what is on the page.

- ✗ Handbook guidance for orange items isn't an exact script, and still relies on your teaching experience and *judgement* about how to introduce, run, and discuss the resource items in your class. There *are* some steps that are scripted or ask you to use an exact method, but these are always clearly marked.
- ✓ They *do* give specific steps to complete and points to cover, to help your pupils make needed connections and gain the concepts they will need to progress through LEANS.

When you see an orange resource item or section, please do the following:

- **Deliver all the steps, in order.** As elsewhere in LEANS, these usually build on each other toward bigger ideas, at the end of the activity or across activities.
- **Use the provided examples.** This is especially important for whole-class examples that precede small group or individual work. Initial “let’s do it together” examples have been very carefully chosen.
- **Use the content provided in the supporting materials.** Materials such as discussion scenarios have been planned to introduce or explore specific LEANS concepts, including ones that may not be featured in other materials. Activity 4.2 is a clear example of this. While it may be easy for you to write your own, we ask you not to unless the provided examples pose a problem in your class.
- **Usually, running discussion/feedback will be up to you. Where we ask you to do it in a particular way, please follow that plan as much as possible.** When we indicate specific strategies, especially ones that may appear non-obvious, this comes from our educator design team and there is always a reason. Often it is safety, and to avoid singling out individuals and their experiences. Activity 6.2 is a good example of this.
- **Cover the planned discussion points or goals.** *See below.*

This orange activity asks me to “discuss with my class”, what does that mean?

Orange-marked discussions have **pre-defined goals to achieve, and points to cover**. This is different from a discussion where the purpose might be general reflection or answering pupil questions.

Discussions at the end of LEANS activities or videos (or integrated within some stories) are a main mechanism for pupils to synthesise and connect concepts. This is critical for activities that may not seem to be “about” neurodiversity on the surface. **Instructions in these sections tend to focus on giving a pathway of strategic questions, points, or examples to help pupils work toward a desired conclusion, such as a Key Point.**

Unless explicitly indicated otherwise, it is still up to you, with your knowledge of your class, to manage the discussion in the way that you think can best achieve discussion goals.

What does it mean if orange instructions “suggest” something?

If we say suggestion, it really is a suggestion—not a rule! We’re trying to help your pupils get the most out of participation, or to have ideas available at places where you might get stuck.

Green: This activity is flexible and can be adapted

Green activities (or sections of mixed activities) are more flexible because their *goals* tend to be more general. Many warm-up activities or review activities are green. Some greens are marked as optional.

Green activities are often suitable for using tools/activities your class already has in place. For example, if your class has journals, they could use these to reflect on their own communication in activity **3.5**. If you always review content with a game, you could do that in review activity **7.1**. Some activity steps or sections are green because teachers could **add** additional material or make other curriculum connections if they wish (like **1.3**).

Yellow: mixed flexibility

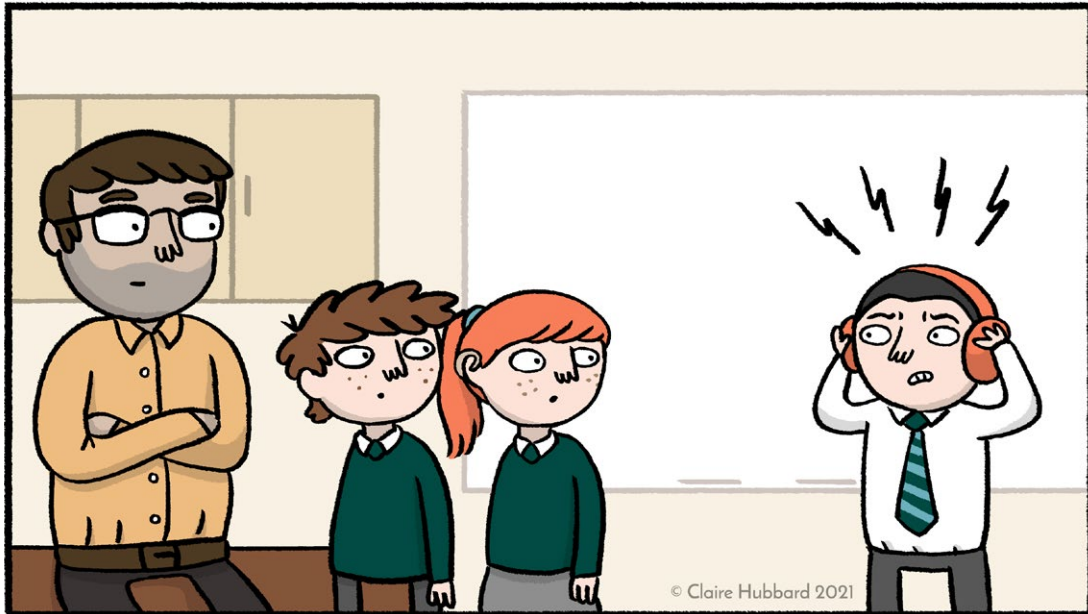
This resource item has multiple elements or steps that are not all at the same level of flexibility. There will be a yellow label at the top of the activity, and then individual sections of the instructions are marked with either orange “deliver as written” or green “flexible” labels.

2.3.3 Too close to real life?

Educators contributing to LEANS stressed that teachers should be able to directly edit materials if needed, particularly for reasons of safety and ethics. **We would encourage you to consider edits for the following reasons, if they apply to your class:**

- **Changing a story character’s name**, if it is the same as (or very similar to) someone in your class. This is to avoid any real pupil feeling targeted or singled out—or having other pupils identify them with the character.
- **Changing or cutting activity scenarios or discussion questions** if they are “too close” to sensitive issues in your own class or school.

Do consider carefully before making changes, even if the above reasons apply in your class. You may not wish to automatically cut everything that seems related to real situations!

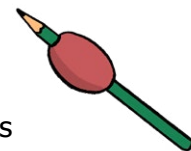


Another way to look at this issue is that if kids don't feel they can ask questions about things that seem different, or about needs and supports, they may make assumptions and invent their own explanations. Those assumptions may be more problematic and negative than directly addressing the real situation (e.g. some pupils getting extra time on a test) and treating it in an open, ordinary way. These types of discussions can be important for modelling the normalcy of neurodivergence and support needs in class.

I need to edit, so where are the names?

The main place that character names appear are in the **stories**. If you are amending names, that means that you would need to change two files for each story:

- LEANS story booklet
- Stories within the PowerPoint slides for each unit, as character names appear in the illustration captions



Some **activities** also include character names, because they focus on classroom scenarios (see **4.2**, **5.5** and **7.3**). There are no names used in **videos** and **classroom posters**.

Certain examples feature heavily in the stories and illustrations, and it would be difficult to cut them out without creating major problems. For example, there is extensive discussion in both the Unit 5 stories and fairness video about a character who has difficulty writing by hand, and sometimes uses a computer as a support. Cutting this would leave a large hole!

If you think there is a story event or an example with the potential to truly be damaging to people in your class, you must of course use your own judgement about what to do. If you are in this tricky position, we'd encourage the following, to minimise the likelihood of creating knock-on problems where pupils miss crucial information or later stories refer to events that no longer exist.

- Review *all* of the stories before making a final decision about how to cut or change anything in a way that least affects later content—do not edit unit-by-unit as you go along.
- Check the relevant illustrations and their captions in the story slides. Be aware that a small number of illustrations are revisited in later stories.
- Review the videos, as these recycle artwork from many stories, and also introduce new examples (e.g. difficulties people may have, supports they use).

2.4 What do the LEANS terms of use and licensing mean for me?

Please review the full terms of use in [Appendix D](#), or on the LEANS resource website. This section gives a summary only!

All of the LEANS materials are copyrighted, including the illustrations. The handbook and associated LEANS materials are published under a [Creative Commons CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0](#) license: Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International

We chose this licensing option because we want people to share and use these free resources, and want teachers to have some flexibility to adapt LEANS in their own setting. However, there are still restrictions on what you can do, especially **around sharing adapted or translated versions of the LEANS resources**. Table 4 gives a summary, but there are more details and conditions in the full terms of use.

Table 4 Summary of what is and isn't allowed by the LEANS terms of use

YOU CAN:	YOU CANNOT:
• Download, print or photocopy any of the LEANS materials without charge, as many times as you like. • Share the resources for free, under the terms of a CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0 license • Adapt the resources for use within your school only • Translate the LEANS resources into another language for use in your school only.	• Charge a fee for anyone to use any LEANS materials, original or adapted. • Distribute any adapted versions beyond your own school or organisation – not even for free. • Distribute any translated versions beyond your own school or organisation – not even for free. • Make any income whatsoever from LEANS materials or LEANS-related activities.

This license means that you can adapt the LEANS resource for use in your own classroom. You might make such adaptations jointly with colleagues, for example to tailor the resource to your school, in which case a group of teachers across your school might all use the adapted handbook. That is allowed. **However, you may not distribute adapted versions of the LEANS resource e.g. by sharing them with another school or posting them online.**

Please also keep in mind that these restrictions also apply to our beautiful illustrations!

Many people have invested their time and expertise in making this resource freely available for educators around the world. LEANS isn't and shouldn't be for sale. Please respect our team by respecting our terms of use.



3. Safety issues, risks, and pre-delivery safety planning

3.1 LEANS and potential risks

Following the handbook guidance as you go along isn't enough to deliver LEANS safely, especially with respect to protecting and supporting individuals. You will need to **plan prior to LEANS delivery** in order to link up LEANS with your local policies and supports, and make sure you/other staff members have an agreed plan in case tricky situations arise.

As noted in the introduction, teaching about neurodiversity includes some risk, like teaching other sensitive topics. During LEANS' development, we have worked hard to predict possible risks in teaching about neurodiversity, and to manage them. **This is one reason there is such detailed teacher guidance, with safety issues explicitly marked in some activities: to reduce risks as far as possible,** especially those that might follow from pupils disclosing highly personal information during LEANS activities.



You'll see safety and ethics information in boxes like these

The safety recommendations in this section are very general. Throughout the handbook, more detailed information about safety, risks, or ethics is marked with the **red safety symbol**. The purpose of the symbol and associated content is to help teachers make choices that minimise risks to individuals or the class.

Content marked with a warning often originated directly from our neurodiverse educator design team contributing to LEANS and sharing their experiences.

What type of risks are we thinking of, in relation to teaching about neurodiversity?

Broadly, most risks involve people using their neurodiversity knowledge to hurt others in the school community (intentionally or unintentionally), or people feeling distressed as a result of thinking and talking about neurodiversity. Here are some examples of possible negative situations that were discussed during LEANS' development:

- People share personal information (about neurodivergence or something else) and others actively use it against them.
- New vocabulary fuels teasing, bullying, or ostracising others—similar to the way the term “special”, as in “special needs”, became playground ammunition despite positive intentions.
- Pupils or staff expect to be treated with greater acceptance and understanding as a result of neurodiversity lessons, but this does not happen (causing distress).
- There is speculation about other people's neurotypes, pushing them to disclose personal information they may not want to share (*this one may particularly apply to staff*).
- Pupils or staff know they are (or think they may be) neurodivergent, and become worried or unhappy about this.

Even with careful preparation, one of these situations still might arise. This is why we asked you to **self-assess** the characteristics of your class, to help judge risks associated with LEANS in your own setting.

3.2 What are some of the safety issues around teaching neurodiversity, and what can you do?

3.2.1 Singling out specific pupils, managing disclosure of personal information and experiences



We think this is the most important step you can take to ensure pupils—especially your neurodivergent pupils—have a positive experience.

In class, we know that it's often good for pupils to share and make connections to their own experiences, and you may ask them to do so: “Can you think of a time when you...?” “Do you ever feel like...?” However, on the advice of our educator design team, LEANS activities avoid asking pupils to disclose personal experiences. None of the activities or discussions rely on pupils doing this. They perceived this type of disclosure as both risky and potentially stressful, especially to neurodivergent pupils. This is a major reason for our use of fictional characters: they give a shared reference point for neurodiverse experiences, *one step removed from your real class*. **We encourage you not to ask pupils for personal experiences as part of LEANS or other neurodiversity teaching.**

Why do we think this is such a big safety issue, especially for neurodivergent pupils? Some pupils may be keen to share information about their own experiences, just like our story character Ibrahim, who freely volunteers his ADHD diagnosis. Pupils should be able to share if they wish, but this needs to be balanced with potential unintended consequences beyond the lesson. For example, children might be subjected to teasing outside the class, especially if what they share sounds odd or humorous to classmates. Be watchful for this and move the discussion along, thanking the pupil for their contribution as you go. It's important to do justice to the authentic experiences of neurodivergent children in your class, **but you might need to anticipate possible future negative consequences of personal sharing, because pupils may not envision these on their own.**

Eliciting individuals' experiences also may not help the whole class feel that what is being discussed is relevant to them, whether they are neurotypical or neurodivergent. Focusing on neurodivergent pupils and their experiences undermines the message that neurodiversity doesn't equate to neurodivergence, but is about everyone.

A final reason for not calling on people to share their experiences is that we don't owe others an explanation of our challenges or needs. LEANS content discusses this explicitly in Unit 5.

As you start LEANS, it might be worth making the "no singling out" principle explicit to any children in your class who know they are neurodivergent (even if they don't use that word). If they are reassured explicitly that they will never be asked to share something personal, they may find it easier to enjoy the topic and concentrate on what they can learn from it.

3.2.2 Treating neurodiversity as an outgroup label

While developing LEANS, we recognise that there is a chance that a misunderstood version of "neurodiversity" could become shorthand for children who are perceptibly different, or have ASN, ALN, or SEND. People using "neurodiversity" in that way may have misunderstood it, rather than having any bad intent. This mis-use of the term is **extremely common!**

We encourage you to intervene if you hear pupils using "neurodiversity" or "neurodiverse" as an outgroup label – e.g. "my sister is neurodiverse" or "kids with neurodiversity get extra time in tests".

If this happens you can remind pupils that:

- Neurodiversity includes everyone.
- 'Neurodiversity' refers to the differences present across people in a group, and does not describe individuals. Individuals can be neurotypical, or neurodivergent.
- We can't tell who is neurodivergent and who isn't just by looking!
- YOU are just as different from someone else as they are from YOU!

Beyond these, you can take steps to counter that interpretation by emphasising our *samenesses* as well as our differences across the LEANS curriculum.

3.2.3 Automatically assigning blame and responsibility to people who are different

There are multiple chunks of LEANS content that ask pupils to explain events, generate ideas, and consider courses of actions for school situations. Trying to problem-solve, pupils may jump to familiar ideas that focus on atypical *individuals*, and unilaterally assign them the responsibility to change things (without considering the environment, or whether other people could or should change). These ideas are everywhere, and it's unsurprising for pupils to bring them to LEANS.

Focusing only on individuals' actions and responsibilities can reinforce the idea that neurodivergence is a problem, for them and others. These attitudes and expectations disproportionately impact neurodivergent pupils (or those who are different in other ways), who are likely to already face high demands to alter their behaviour at school. These attitudes can also feed into beliefs or decisions that some types of needs aren't important or aren't needs at all, because a majority of people don't have them or don't understand them.

Activity **4.2** asks teachers to listen for these types of explanations, actively question them, and to help pupils identify alternatives. **Continuing to counter this type of thinking in the classroom can be an important legacy of LEANS in your class.**

3.2.4 Setting—and keeping—ground rules

The *Recommended delivery* section (Part 3, section 2) already advised setting ground rules in your class before delivering LEANS, and reviewing these along the way. These form an important safety tool, by establishing what is and is not appropriate in how we talk about neurodiversity and neurodivergent people.

3.3 Pre-delivery safety planning for classroom staff

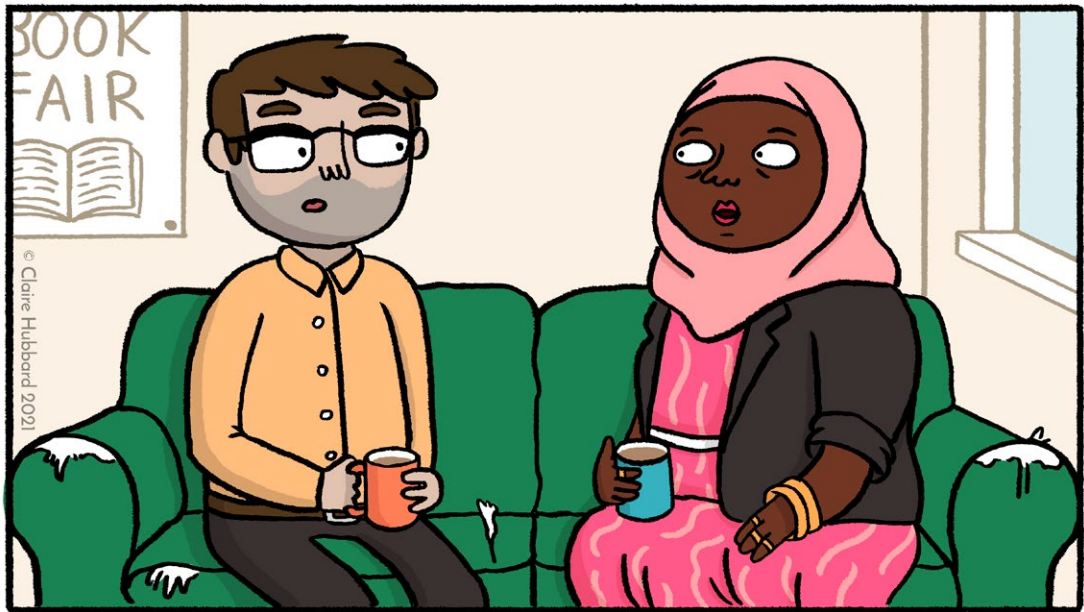


You should already have completed a self-evaluation exercise. **Pre-delivery safety planning** is a separate step. You will need to do this every year you are delivering LEANS, regardless of individual answers in your self-evaluation.

The handbook introduction and LEANS teacher checklist (prior to Table of Contents) introduced the idea of **pre-delivery safety planning**. This is about maximising people's safety during LEANS teaching, and in the longer term.

Safety planning is focused on considering how safety issues might manifest in YOUR classroom. A planning list might look like this:

- 1. Consider possible issues specific to your class:** Based on who is in your class this year, do you foresee any specific issues that might pose risks? Is there anything you can do to head off the issues, or to address them if they happen?
- 2. Setting ground rules for the class:** Decide what ground rules you will set for LEANS teaching, and how you will communicate these. Will there be consequences if people don't respect the rules or each other?
- 3. Modelling neurodiversity attitudes:** All adults in the class will be role models for attitudes toward neurodiversity and neurodivergent people. Discuss what you can do (or shouldn't do) in your class to model respect and acceptance.
- 4. Planning for sensitive conversations with pupils:** Pupils are very likely to raise sensitive neurodiversity issues at some point. These may be not only tricky to respond to, but high stakes for pupils themselves—like asking if they have a certain diagnosis, or could get different support. Any or all of these could happen unexpectedly *and publicly!* You don't want to be unprepared. *See below.*
- 5. Planning for sensitive conversations with parents and carers:** Pupils may talk about LEANS at home, or parents may get in touch based on info you send home. Again, you don't want to be unprepared for conversations that may be very significant for that family. *See below.*
- 6. Being alert for bullying:** Even with the most careful planning, it's possible that neurodiversity-related bullying, ostracism, or name-calling could happen in your class. What might that look like, and what can you do if it happens?



Who should be part of safety planning?

If your classroom has multiple staff members who are regularly present, we strongly encourage you to involve *all* of them in safety planning as much as possible, or at minimum make sure everyone is aware of the final plan. *You* might not be the one there when a tricky situation or conversation happens!

3.3.1 More on planning for sensitive conversations

This aspect of planning is about being prepared with what you or other staff will do and say if delicate, neurodiversity-related issues arise before, during, or after LEANS teaching. These could be in class with children, or with parents and carers.

With respect to children in your class, we are thinking of issues like...

- A child saying that they think they may be neurodivergent, have diagnosis X, or asking if they need a diagnosis. They may be curious about this, or excited, or upset (or all three...).
- A child asking you if you think they are neurodivergent.
- A child saying someone else is neurodivergent, or asking personal questions about their needs or supports.
- A child asking for more help and support in the classroom.

With respect to parents or carers, we are thinking of issues like...

- Following up on conversations from home, about whether their child may be neurodivergent.
- Requests for help or information on accessing diagnostic assessments.
- Requests for help or information on supports (in or out of school).
- Concern that you are teaching this topic *because* of their neurodivergent child, or might be singling them out.
- Whether LEANS affects the support their child already receives.

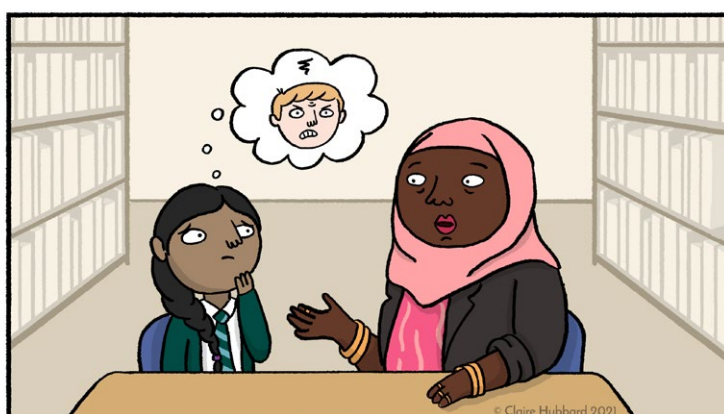
Of course, there's a much longer list of possibilities here, including parents who disagree with teaching about neurodiversity at all!

A sensitive conversation doesn't automatically mean a negative conversation. People might feel happy or energised or relieved. Are support and understanding finally on the way at last?! On the other hand, they may be worried or confused. What's going on, and can anyone help? Try to follow the emotional tone set by the person you are talking to: acknowledge their worries but try not to commiserate – remember, LEANS tells us that being neurodivergent isn't inherently a bad thing (even if it can potentially be very difficult).

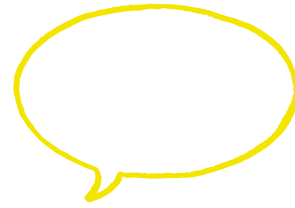
If you infrequently speak with children or families about diversity, inclusion, or disability issues, we would encourage you to spend some time preparing for these conversations, so you aren't caught off guard if they happen unexpectedly—or publicly!

Making a plan

Planning depends on what policies and supports your school already has in place, and what you and other staff members feel comfortable with. Obviously, you may also need different strategies for individual pupils or families. Part 5, section 1 has more detailed suggestions for talking to parents and children about issues in LEANS, and we would encourage you to review it as part of your planning. These are suggestions only. **We cannot tell you exactly what to do, only encourage you to be ready for issues like these to come up. It's likely *something* will.**



Three general pieces of neurodiversity conversation advice



Based on asking teachers and parents about what they value in conversations like these, we encourage you to...

1. **Be respectful.** It sounds obvious, but that doesn't make it less essential!
2. **Keep in mind that how you react may be even more important than what you say,** especially if someone is asking or sharing information about themselves. Will they think you are taking them seriously? Are you showing a positive attitude toward neurodiversity and neurodivergence—or acting like these things are a problem?
3. **Look for constructive actions and alternatives.** What do people want to have happen as a result of this conversation? Can you do anything? Some parent/carer requests may be for things you personally can't fix, like diagnostic referrals—but you may be able to suggest a useful book or a relevant organisation that they could look up *right now*.

Extra resources and organisations listed on the LEANS website may help.

3.3.2 Find out who else can help

This is not explicitly a safety issue, but we still recommend it as a planning step related to child and parent/carer conversations: **find out who else can help**. People may raise questions you can't answer, or ask for specialist advice or support that's outside your remit. Who *can* help? If you don't already know the answers, find out who else in your school or local authority might be able to offer help and advice on issues like seeking diagnoses or accessing assistive technologies.

Don't forget that there will be help and information from outside your school, such as from charities or parent groups. The LEANS resource website includes a **list of organisations** related to neurodiversity issues, children, disability, and/or education (covers the UK nations, Ireland). Also, don't forget books and websites as important sources of support that people can access *right now*, without waiting on professionals or paperwork.

Part 4

LEANS content by unit



Unit reference

1. How this part of the handbook is organised

Note about numbering in Part 4, unit content

For ease of reference, items in the unit content are labelled with relation to their *position in the unit*—not their position in this handbook document. For example, a reference to **item 1.3** means the third item in Unit 1.

Part 4 of the handbook contains the seven units of content that you will deliver to your class. Each unit begins with a **Unit summary for teachers**, giving an overall description of the unit and what pupils will do and discuss. It then notes the unit's Key Points, and gives an outline of its constituent resource items.

The rest of each unit gives entries for each resource item in their order of use, with the following information:

1. What type of resource this is (e.g. video, story)
2. General format of activity (e.g. whole class, small group)
3. Time estimate to deliver the activity (see next section)
4. Flexibility ratings¹⁶
5. Key Points addressed in the item
6. Materials needed
7. Pre-delivery preparation tasks and time estimate for teachers
8. Teaching tips to think about [only in some resource items]
9. Step-by-step instructions to introduce, deliver, and discuss the resource item

Safety warnings can appear in any section!

¹⁶ See Part 3, Section 2.3 about flexibility rating symbols.

As noted in the introduction, one unit does not equal one lesson, and the units are not all the same length due to varying numbers and complexity of their resource items. The next section explains **time estimates** for resource delivery and teacher preparation in more detail.

Again, we strongly encourage you to review as much of the handbook and accompanying materials as possible, before beginning to deliver LEANS.

2. About resource item time estimates

Each resource item includes two different time estimates:

- Estimated teacher preparation time
- Estimated face-to-face delivery time in your class

We must stress that the numbers in the handbook are *estimates*, not guarantees! Your class or your chosen delivery options may take less time, or need longer.

All time estimates assume that your class size is approximately 25 pupils, and that only one teacher is preparing and delivering the content (i.e. not supported by a teaching assistant or other staff member).

2.1 What is included in the time estimates?

Preparation time estimate: This includes tasks related *only* to delivering the current resource item. Often, these include:

- Reviewing materials that are provided as separate files or links (outwith the handbook), such as printable pupil handouts, videos, or story text.
- Choosing which examples or materials to use from those provided, making minor edits to these.
- Printing handouts and gathering physical materials e.g. drawing supplies

The preparation time estimates do *not* include:

- Reading through the handbook instructions for that activity or item.
- Finding or creating your *own* examples or materials, if you're not using those provided.

Delivery time estimate: This is the estimated face-to-face classroom time required to deliver that resource item. If an activity format specifically requires pupils to work in groups, the estimate already includes time to move pupils into their groups, etc.

2.2 Where did the estimates come from?

The estimates in the handbook represent a combination of information reported in the 2021 evaluation study, and a review of the final post-evaluation materials by our educator design team.

Teachers' timings varied widely for some types of content, especially time needed for group/class discussions and for arts-based activities. As far as possible, the estimates in the handbook represent "medium" timing, between the shortest and longest estimates. Teachers generally agreed that having pupils work in groups (where there are options about group vs. individual work) may add extra time.

Time estimates for story delivery are based on reading aloud at a rate of 80 words per minute (this was approximately the average speed, across different teachers' estimates).

3. About LEANS unit posters

There are seven LEANS classroom posters, one for each unit. **Using the posters is optional.** Posters are provided as downloadable PDFs, and have been designed to be printed in colour at **A3 size**. Poster text should still be legible if they are printed as A4s.

Posters are not complete summaries of the units, or even of all the Key Points in each unit. Posters use text and story/video images as a reminder of selected important ideas within the unit. We encourage you *not* to use them as a stand-alone resource, outwith LEANS. If you choose to use the posters alongside other LEANS materials, **please display this poster in your classroom during or after the end of each unit.**



"I really like how the illustrations on the posters match memorable story points as it really helps to reinforce the message from the lessons"
–Evaluation study teacher



Figure 7. Unit 2 poster

Here is an example poster from **Unit 2** (Figure 7). The main illustration at the top of the poster is from story **2.2**, and shows three pupils reacting differently to the Mind's Eye drawing activity in their class, directly supporting the 'headline' about learning and thinking differently.

At the bottom of the poster, we see another character, reading quietly while wearing his ear defenders (instead of being in the painfully noisy PE lesson).

4. Overview: The LEANS characters and stories

4.1 Setting the scene: Bubbleburn Primary

We want as many children as possible to see our fictional school as relevant to their own lives. LEANS stories are deliberately vague as to the location and characteristics of Bubbleburn Primary. They do not name UK nations, regions, landmarks, and so on. There is little description of the setting—mentioning a park and a corner shop, with children walking to and from school.

The stories don't state what **year** the class is, or list any **ages**, though the characters are intended to be in the same age range as the LEANS target audience (8-11 years). For this reason, the stories are also vague about the class's lesson topics!

4.2 Overview of the LEANS stories

Every story has an entry in the handbook under the relevant unit. The LEANS story booklet and illustrations (within Unit PowerPoints) are in the downloadable files.

During the LEANS stories, Mr Oliver's fictional classroom in Bubbleburn Primary goes through a process of learning about neurodiversity over at least six months of the school year. They engage with many of the same activities that you will do with your own class.

We hear the most about **six main characters** (next section) who go on a metaphorical journey over the course of the stories. Collectively they become more accepting both of their own and others' differences, and more confident self-advocates for their own needs.

The stories start in **Unit 1** with an introduction to the school and characters, followed by recounting a dramatic incident in class. Ibi, a normally cheerful and laid-back boy, is pushed beyond his limits by a challenging scenario – and by others' negative and public judgements. The incident leads the class's **staff members** Mr. Oliver and Mrs. Adeyemi (see next section) to decide that learning about neurodiversity is an important thing for them to do together.

Thereafter the stories progress through the following main events:

- **Unit 2:** In PE and poetry lessons, as well as a "mind's eye" drawing activity (which you will also do during LEANS) the class start to recognise differences in how they process information
- **Unit 3:** We see two examples, during a drama lesson, of people not feeling listened to by their classmates. Lessons are learned about the many means by which we communicate and why we might misunderstand each other.
- **Unit 4:** Mr Oliver removes posters that are distracting one pupil, but in doing so causes problems for someone else who needed them as a visual support. In the absence of the posters, another pupil steps in and is pushy about "helping", ignoring class agreements. Mr. Oliver works with the pupils to resolve the conflicting need.
- **Unit 4:** Some pupils learn about why one classmate doesn't attend indoor PE, revealing how we can be different in our sensory experiences too, and further illustrating needs-wants distinctions.
- **Unit 5:** We hear about a neighbouring class at Bubbleburn Primary that is taking a rigid approach to fairness by making everything *exactly* the same. This quickly escalates to ridiculous extremes.

- **Unit 5:** Pupils directly confront the concept of fairness in relation to using a computer to type, instead of handwrite, a book report. Mr Oliver uses a balance-scale metaphor to show how we may need different tools to tackle our different challenges.
- **Unit 6:** In two stories of neurotypical-neurodivergent friendship, we see a new friendship kindled from a shared interest, and an old friendship challenged by changing circumstances at school and in their personal lives.

The stories end in **Unit 7** with another dramatic moment: a pupil asks for help with reading for the very first time, after he has vehemently resisted all help in the past. All eyes are on him—and we have a chance to see how far everyone in the class has come. They react in a much more understanding and accepting way, deliberately not making a big deal out of this situation. However, the stories do not have a “fairy-tale” happy ending. Mr. Oliver and Mrs. Adeyemi reflect that acceptance and positive choices are part of a process. Their class has made a strong start—but will need to keep on making positive choices in the future.

4.3 LEANS story characters

Staff members

We don’t get to know either of the main staff characters in much detail, to help keep the focus on the child characters and their experiences.

Mr. Oliver: (He/His) The class teacher in the LEANS stories, who has been teaching at Bubbleburn Primary for several years. We see him trying to consistently listen to pupils and show them respect, even when he doesn’t agree with them. Where people are struggling, he is anxious to help them tackle those problems. Overall, he is mild-mannered and easy-going, who seems willing to try his hand at teaching almost any subject. He thinks very carefully about explaining neurodiversity to his pupils, though isn’t always confident about what to say.

Mrs. Adeyemi: (She/her) She provides classroom support to Mr Oliver’s class – she might be classed as a teaching assistant or learning support assistant (terminology varies). We especially see her work with **Ibrahim**, a pupil with an ADHD diagnosis. Mrs Adeyemi is patient and understanding, but also not afraid to tell someone when they have crossed a line! Mrs Adeyemi has brown skin and wears a headscarf – like many characters she was intended to help reflect the diversity of ethnicities and cultures in the UK. *See more about this in Appendix A, on creating LEANS.*

Main child characters

Our main characters aim to illustrate a range of experiences, including multiple *dissimilar* neurodivergent experiences. Some characters have formal diagnoses, others do not.

It was not possible to include one example each of even the most widely diagnosed conditions that are often placed under the neurodiversity “umbrella”. More characters would mean less time getting to know each one—and the risk that pupils can’t remember them all! Limiting the number of main characters also means that each person may seem to have a lot going on!



Rashida: (She/her) Rashida is academically very capable, highly motivated, and enjoys school—all things she shares with best friend **Amelia**. Social interactions with other classmates are less of a strength. Rashida can have very black-and-white thinking, and focus on rules or what people “should” be doing. While classmates may read this as trying to be “perfect” or to show others up, rules are Rashida’s comfort blanket. They help her make sense of what’s happening and why, and feel control in distressing situations.

Rashida shows many autistic traits, but does not have a diagnosis (though we hear her brother does). She represents a type of neurodivergent school experience where high achievement can be mixed with substantial, ongoing confusion and stress.

Simon: (He/his) Simon is a relatively quiet child who tries to blend in and follow peers because it feels safest. He is keen on maths—like his friend Joseph—and also enjoys drawing. Simon has significant difficulties with reading and writing, and feels angry and defensive about this. He doesn’t have a formal diagnosis, but shows characteristics of Dyslexia.

Simon is very sensitive to negative attention from others. He never asks for reading help for that reason, and also because he feels he doesn’t really deserve it, or even that it would be “wrong” in some way. Over the stories, Simon starts to change his mind...





Nic: (They/them) Nic comes from a large family with 5 children – as the middle child they have learned to be a peacemaker and a good listener. Nic is keen on reading for fun, and prefers that to something like PE! Nic is almost certainly neurotypical. They don't struggle at school, but nor do they excel. Between that and many siblings, they worry about being middle-of-the-road at everything, and long to be "the best"—at *something*! Over the course of the stories, they come to realise that their biggest talent might be communicating and working with people.

Nic is a non-binary character, which is why they use they / them pronouns.

As noted in Part 3 Section 2, you may need to change names that are shared with real pupils in your class. If you already have a Nicholas, Nicola, Nicole etc. and need to change Nic's name, we'd ask you to choose another name that isn't clearly gendered (we know that may vary regionally/generationally!). For example, they might become a Sam, Vic, or Cam.



Ibrahim, known as **Ibi**: (He/him) Everyone likes Ibi and thinks of him as the "class clown". He is often the centre of attention—and talented at keeping everyone entertained! Sometimes his desire to perform and his lack of inhibitions can make him a disruptive element in the classroom. Ibi has a diagnosis of ADHD and is comfortable talking about it to anyone and everyone.

During the LEANS stories, we learn that Ibi is also ambitious and knows he will have to do well at school and beyond to achieve his goal of becoming a doctor. It's becoming more personally important—and frustrating—to him that he can't always focus and work in class. He's becoming less comfortable with the "class clown" role. But if he stops, will his lifelong best friend **Jack** still like him?



Jack: (He/his) Jack is a neurotypical child who finds nearly all aspects of school straightforward – including lessons, sports and friendships. He tends to be friendly, relaxed, and confident. So far, he has had few reasons not to be, and also few reasons to consider that not everyone finds school as easy as he does.

Jack has been lifelong best friends with **Ibrahim**. He is Ibi's most devoted audience—Ibi has always been there for Jack, and can always make Jack laugh. However, Jack hasn't always understood the real impact of Ibrahim's difficulties, and how effortful he can find it to focus and work in class. During the stories, Jack comes to understand others in the class better, and his friendship with Ibi matures.

Morag: (She/her) Morag has a diagnosis of Developmental Coordination Disorder, though she usually hears adults talk about it as Dyspraxia. Morag knows that she appears awkward and clumsy to her classmates, and has low expectations for others liking or interacting with her. Morag doesn't have close friends, and wishes that she did. The closest to a friend is her beloved pet rabbit! Near the end of the stories, we see Morag start to develop a friendship, when she and a classmate (**Kristina**) give each other a second chance and find shared interests.



Morag has a patchy understanding of her own needs, and her classmates have none at all! Some supports, like using a computer for her assignments, are well-established—but other types of tasks can be a misery. Over the course of the stories she becomes a more confident self-advocate in terms of asking for support.

Secondary characters

The following secondary characters play the greatest roles in the LEANS stories. Other pupils are mentioned in passing, but we find out less about them.

Amelia: (She/her) Amelia is best friends with **Rashida**, and also an academic high achiever. Amelia is determined to "help" other people because she knows best, but she often doesn't consider the impact on others.

Anna-Jade: (She/her) Anna-Jade is present in the stories to say things that children in your own class may be thinking, but reluctant to say. She has a negative attitude toward the neurodiversity lessons, and repeats views like ADHD "not being real" and classroom supports being unfair. Having a character express these views in the story gives us a chance to address them head-on and consider alternative explanations.

Declan and Harry: (both He/him) Declan and Harry are friends. They are both quiet, shy pupils somewhat on the periphery of the class. Either or both could be neurodivergent, but nothing is specified. **Declan** wears orange ear defenders all the time because he is extremely sensitive to sound. **Harry** finds it hard to speak up in front of other people, and even harder when he is feeling stressed or on the spot.

Kristina, Mei-Ling, and Neelam: (all She/her) These girls are a close and *closed* friendship group, doing everything together. All three are probably neurotypical, though we do hear about Neelam receiving extra help with maths. They represent everything that outsider **Morag** *doesn't* have, and show how hurtful a passive, disinterested exclusion of peers can be.

Also mentioned in the stories:

Joseph: (He/him) Simon's friend, and also keen on maths. He was born without one hand and lower arm. This is visible in several illustrations, but the stories do not discuss it directly.

Orla: (She/her) A friend of Nic's who is also keen on reading. She uses hearing aids, and these are depicted in the story illustrations and videos.

Mr. Singh and Ms. Stanton: (He/him; She/her) They are co-teachers next door to Mr. Oliver's class, and are new to Bubbleburn Primary. They are enthusiastic and earnest. They are also determined to have "the fairest classroom ever"—with increasingly chaotic results (Unit 5).

Unit 1

Introduction to neurodiversity



Should I introduce neurodiversity before Unit 1?

No, there is no need to introduce neurodiversity vocabulary or concepts before starting to deliver the LEANS units. This is the purpose of Unit 1.

Unit 1 was designed on the assumption that at least part of your class—maybe everyone—will never have encountered neurodiversity terms before. These are introduced in “explainer video” **1.3**. Terms are not the first thing in Unit 1 because the design team strongly believed that we needed to **catch pupils’ attention** up-front, and get them interested in hearing more. Starting with a game-like activity and story (**1.1** and **1.2**) means that pupils arrive at video **1.3** with more context for the neurodiversity vocabulary.

Finally, if your class has already heard about neurodiversity or talked about related topics like dyslexia or autism, that’s great! No changes are suggested—please deliver Unit 1 as outlined in the handbook. Skipping the initial content, particularly the story, would make later material hard to understand, as it refers back to Unit 1 throughout.



Unit 1 summary for teachers

Delivery time estimate for Unit 1: 1 hr 45 min to 2 hrs 10 min

What is this unit about?

This unit introduces your class to the concept of **neurodiversity**, and prepares everyone to explore this idea further in the following units. It's meant to spark their interest, and encourage them to see neurodiversity as applying to everyone, not only "others", somewhere else.

The introduction unit touches on many **ideas that will re-appear throughout the rest of the LEANS units and resources** in addition to neurodiversity terms, such as impacts of the sensory environment (particularly in Unit 2), similarities and differences, the ups and downs of friendship (particularly Unit 6), and how our choices impact others within our school communities (particularly Units 4, 5, and 7).

Unit 1: Introduction to Neurodiversity is structured around the following Key Points [KP]:

1. **Neurodiversity means that we are all different in how we think, feel, and learn, because our brains process information differently.** Neurodiversity includes everyone, because everyone has a brain!
2. **Differences between people's brains can be little differences, or big differences.** Most people have brains that are only a little different from one another, and they are called *neurotypical*. However, some people's brains have big differences compared to neurotypical brains. People with "more different" brains like these are called *neurodivergent*.
3. **Neurodivergent people are also different from each other.** Sometimes, we use labels to describe patterns of differences, such as *dyslexia*, *dyspraxia*, *ADHD*, or *autism*. Neurodivergent people might have one of these labels, or several, or none at all!
4. **How I choose to treat other people in class can make a big difference to how they feel and how their school day goes.**

The resource items in this unit are:

1.1. Would you rather...? [Activity, preparation to encounter KP1, KP4]

- A game that challenges students to consider their preferences for different experiences and situations, and practise reflecting on and justifying why that may be.
- Students see that even their friends may have surprisingly different preferences (or justifications) than themselves.

1.2. "Meet the class" [Story, preparation for KPs 1-3, KP4]

- Introduces Mr. Oliver's fictional classroom at Bubbleburn Primary, filled with neurodiverse characters. It relates a dramatic incident that causes the class to start a neurodiversity topic in their classroom, hoping to benefit everyone.
- The same characters and school appear in activity and story content throughout the LEANS resource pack.

1.3. Introducing neurodiversity [Video resource, explicitly introduces KPs 1-3]

- A 9.5-minute video that introduces key neurodiversity concepts and vocabulary in a child-friendly way. It then generally introduces how differences related to neurodivergence can affect people's school experiences.
- Terms introduced: brain, neuron, information processing, neurodiversity, neurodivergent, neurotypical

1.4. "Neurodiversity is new" [Story, KPs 1-4]

- The fictional class has just watched a video about neurodiversity too. They revisit the new terminology, and ask clarifying questions about questions about neurodiversity, neurodivergence, and information processing.
- Some characters share that they have diagnostic labels, or privately reflect on their diagnoses.

Unit 1 classroom poster (*available for download*)

Sharing scientific information

This is the unit that talks most directly about the “**neuro**” part of **neurodiversity**, though it forms a relatively small component. There is a lot of appealing but false information about brains and neuroscience available online and in popular media—much of it deliberately marketed to educators and schools. This is an area where you need to use your critical skills to evaluate information and look for conflicts of interest!



Unless you are already teaching topics related to the brain or have scientific background in this area, we’d encourage you to **be cautious in sharing brain information with your class**. This is a good opportunity to model how and where we can look for scientific information and evaluate its trustworthiness.

1.1 Would you rather...?

Activity

Whole class, teacher-facilitated

Time estimate: 30-40 minutes



Please deliver this activity as written.

Key Points addressed

Preparation to encounter the neurodiversity-related Key Points in this unit, particularly KP1.

1. **Neurodiversity means that we are all different in how we think, feel, and learn, because our brains process information differently.** Neurodiversity includes everyone, because everyone has a brain!

Summary

This game-like activity poses a series of silly-sounding questions that ask pupils to choose between two alternatives, like having a pet koala or a pet dinosaur. The activity moves through three phases of teacher-led discussion, posing successively more challenging “Would you rather?” questions and unpacking students’ reasoning behind their choices. This shared exploration of strengths, challenges, similarities and differences starts preparing the ground to introduce neurodiversity terminology (resource item **1.3**).

As this is the very first LEANS activity, the game is meant to get pupils thinking in a useful direction for the content that is to follow. *It assumes no prior knowledge of neurodiversity concepts or terms, and does not use the terms as a part of the activity.*

Materials

- Unit 1 PowerPoint
- Would you rather? Printable teacher guide with list of game questions and discussion tips

Pre-activity preparation

Time estimate: 15 minutes

- Review teacher guide. Modify affected questions if you think something may pose a particular problem for someone in your class.
- Review the Unit 1 PowerPoint and make any essential modifications.
- Plan your introduction to the activity, and any additional rules or instructions needed (e.g. how pupils will indicate their answers, what to do if they can't decide).



If you haven't decided on any ground rules for delivering LEANS in your class, don't forget to do that before you start! *See our tips in Part 3, Section 2.1.*

Instructions

Step-by-step overview

Part 1: Teacher-led introduction, setting ground rules

Introduce the upcoming activity to your class. We encourage you not to use neurodiversity terminology up-front (this comes later in **video 1.3**), but to focus your introduction on exploring choices and preferences, and how people explain those things.

Explain how you will present the questions, and how people should **indicate their choices**. Let people know what they should do if they can't decide, or strongly prefer/disprefer both options.

As noted in Part 3, Section 2 on general LEANS delivery guidance, setting **ground rules** as part of the introduction can manage expectations about what will happen, and help make the activity positive for everyone.

In addition to any general ground rules you have for LEANS sessions, the activity has the following special rules and information:

- That this is not a quiz! There are no points, and nobody wins.
- There are no wrong answers. Everyone's answer is the right answer for them.
- The most important thing is to try to explain your answer, even if you don't get to share it with the class, or don't want to share it. Do *you* know why you prefer A over B?

Make sure to communicate whether it is/is not acceptable to comment on other people's choices or their explanations.

Part 2: Teacher-facilitated WYR questions

In this part of the activity, the basic pattern is:

1. Present a question on the PowerPoint
2. Allow pupils time to choose
3. Have a short follow-up discussion of the item. Hear from a few people before going on.

Example question, WYR phase 2

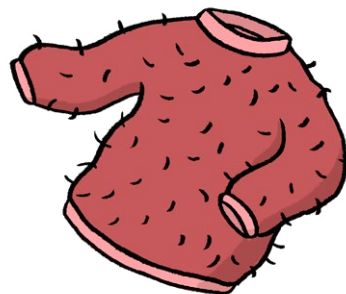
"Would you rather do your homework while smelling a mouldy cheese or while wearing a scratchy jumper?"

Recommended follow-up topics:

- Sensory sensitivities and preferences (smell, texture, touch)
- What affects when are we able to concentrate and do our work?
- Differing extent to which sensory environment may affect us (e.g. annoying but bearable, vs. painful, unable to work at all).



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About the questions and their sequence

We provide an **ordered sequence of questions** that moves from silly, less-personal warm-up questions (Phase 1), through somewhat more personal questions (Phase 2), to challenging questions (Phase 3), each with different opportunities for reflection, guided by you. The sequence of questions is also meant to build trust between classmates and support them to reflect and answer honestly. These are summarised below. The printable teacher guide includes the questions plus useful follow-ups.

Phase	Purpose within the activity	Main reflection points
1. Warm-up	• Get children interested in activity, and peer answers, using questions that are not overly personal. • Practise the pattern of questioning used in the rest of the activity. • Practise identifying and verbalising reasons for our choices.	• Draw attention to there being a pattern of differences across the class, even friends may make different choices. • People may choose the same answer for very different reasons; the same things aren't important to everybody
2. Digging deeper	• Use somewhat more personal questions as an entry point for children to reflect on their preferences and perceived strengths, difficulties. • Questions may specifically prompt reflection on sensory preferences, types of information processing.	• Facilitate reflection on own strengths and challenges and that these will differ from classmates • Draw class attention to dimensions that are relevant for later introducing neurodiversity, including sensory and information processing. • Consider degree to which same things may affect different people.
3. Challenges and trade-offs	• Consider "higher stakes" questions with objectively challenging situations or a choice between two more complex, hypothetical situations that involve trade-offs • Questions bring together multiple individual elements that may have surfaced during phase 2.	• Begin considering trade offs and priorities, e.g. may want a quiet school, but find it very hard not to talk to friends at lunch! • What is most important to you, or affects you most?

All of the WYR questions have some element of **humour or exaggeration**, with the goal of making it easier for children to share honest answers because the situations are one step removed from everyday experiences. For example, asking about whether they would prefer to be part of a superhero team or a superhero working alone, rather than asking about group vs. individual work in the classroom.



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These questions have been carefully chosen to **preview LEANS concepts**. Questions like the moldy cheese vs. scratchy jumper example may sound silly—but it's meant to foreshadow the idea of sensory sensitivities and preferences, and that our reaction to the sensory environment affects our ability to focus and participate. **This is why this is an "Orange" flexibility activity where we ask you to deliver the questions provided, rather than developing questions of your own.**

Follow-up discussions

After posing each question and allowing the class to indicate answers, **follow up with a small number of pupils about their reasoning and feeling:**

1. Why would you rather do [X]?
2. How would it make you feel to do that? / How would it affect you to do that?
3. Why do you think you would feel that way? *If not already answered*

Use the same pattern of follow-up across questions to keep the activity predictable, as students encounter successively harder choices.

Encourage pupils to **be specific, and try to explain how their choice would impact them**. For example, if option B is "gross", you could ask what is gross about it. If a student says she doesn't like something because it's "too hot", you could ask why it's a problem when things are too hot. If people **get stuck** on the discussion, keep going! There are other questions to try, and you don't want the activity to drag.

Part 3: Summary discussion and class reflection

The summary discussion and reflections are preparing your class to encounter the concept and vocabulary of neurodiversity in explainer video **1.3**.

Start by hearing some general reactions to the activity. What did we do, what did we notice? What was it like to make those decisions?

Pupils may focus on differences, but don't forget to draw their attention to similarities too.

The following discussion points will help the class prepare for the next parts of LEANS:

1. Discuss whether some of the differences we noticed may affect people to varying extents. Some people will be more impacted than others (e.g. one student says they don't like something much, and another says they cannot focus and work if that thing is happening).
2. Ask class to consider whether all differences are things we choose, or could change if we wanted to. Are there differences that are part of us? Challenge pupils to think of examples.

In relation to question 2, pupils may quickly conclude that there are differences we don't choose and can't change—but focus on differences like height or cultural background. This is a good start, but encourage them to go further and think about "inside differences" like those highlighted in the game questions (e.g. sensory experiences, preferences about information, how we work, or interacting with others).

More options

Vote by moving

Introduce a non-verbal "voting" method or one that involves movement, so that all students can show their preferences even if only a few have the chance to explain more fully. For example, vote by standing vs. sitting, showing a sign or card, or raising hands. You could also use your teaching space to show preference, e.g. "move to this side of the room for A, the other for B", which also can facilitate more nuanced answers, such as indicating degree of preference on a continuum with undecideds in the middle.

This option was popular in many of our evaluation study classes! If voting by moving, you may need to schedule a little more time for this activity.

1.2 “Meet the class”

Whole class (teacher-led)

Time estimate: 30 minutes

Story



Please deliver this activity as written.

Key Points addressed

Preparation to encounter KPs 1-3 in resource item **1.3**, and also:

4. **How I choose to treat other people in class can make a big difference to how they feel and how their school day goes.**

This story introduces the LEANS characters and their school for the first time. These same characters appear in story content and additional activities throughout the LEANS curriculum.

Downloadable materials

- LEANS story booklet
- Unit 1 PowerPoint. The **1.2** story slides show illustrations of key story scenes supported by captions

Pre-delivery preparation

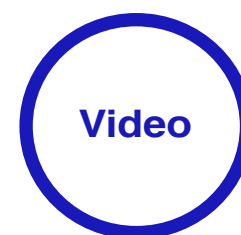
Time estimate: 10 minutes

Download the story materials. Review the story, and make any amendments if needed for ethics and safety reasons.

Instructions

Display the story PowerPoint as you read the story to the class, advancing to the next illustration where marked in the text. Discussion and review points are marked in the text with icons.

1.3 Introducing neurodiversity



Whole class (teacher-led)

Time estimate: 20-30 minutes



DELIVERY NOTE: As this is a video resource, the flexible elements are the pre- or post-video **discussion** in your class, and choosing whether to introduce **additional information** about the brain.

Key Points addressed

1. **Neurodiversity means that we are all different in how we think, feel, and learn, because our brains are different.** Neurodiversity includes everyone, because everyone has a brain!
2. **Differences between people's brains can be little differences**, or big differences. Most people have brains that are only a little different from one another, and they are called *neurotypical*. However, some people's brains have big differences compared to neurotypical brains. People with "more different" brains like these are called *neurodivergent*.
3. **Neurodivergent people are also different from each other.** Sometimes, we use labels to describe patterns of differences, such as *dyslexia*, *dyspraxia*, *ADHD*, or *autism*. Neurodivergent people might have one of these labels, or several, or none at all!

Resource link

"Introducing Neurodiversity" [9.5 minutes]

Video link: https://media.ed.ac.uk/media/1_t9x6udrg

This video is not downloadable, and must be viewed online. The video script appears in the downloadable materials for Unit 1.

Pre-activity preparation (teacher)

This video talks about brains and information processing, though not with a high level of detail. In addition to previewing the video, we suggest that you review the "**Primer on brains and information processing**" in Part 2 of the teacher handbook. LEANS isn't brain-heavy overall. Most of that vocabulary and content is right here in Unit 1!

Instructions

Class preparation to watch the video

Unless your class has already studied the **brain** or **nervous system**, this is a good opportunity to stress the brain's wide range of functions. Even a few minutes talking about the brain should be useful to prepare for the video.

Ask your class to **volunteer ideas of what brains do**. If suggestions focus on "thinking", "learning", or "remembering", you can remind them of completely different types of brain functions such as:

- Telling us how to move our bodies, keeping our balance, and knowing where our body parts are in space
- Making sense of "incoming information" from senses like sight, touch, smell, and hearing
- Processing spoken, written, and signed languages
- Planning how to do something
- Feeling our emotions and understanding other people's emotions

Introduce that you will all watch a **video about neurodiversity**.

Ask for ideas about what that word means. Has anyone heard of *neurodiversity* before?

Watching the video

Watch the video straight through. It does not include any discussion questions or other tasks integrated into the video.

Post-video, point ahead to the rest of the LEANS content: we will continue to talk about neurodiversity, and how it affects people at school.

If your class has lots of questions, Mr. Oliver's explanations to the fictional class in story 1.4 might help to answer these.

Video content summary

- This video introduces the concept of neurodiversity as resulting from *differences in our brains' information processing*, and gives examples of what that can mean, especially within a school context.
- The central part of the video focuses on discussing a metaphor for neurodiversity at school: a mixed group of trees growing in a woodland. One group of trees is in the majority—this woodland is an environment that perfectly meets their needs for water, shade, etc. Other types of trees are growing, but they are minorities, and this environment is less ideal for their needs. *See more explanation of this metaphor, below.*
- Introduces key vocabulary for the LEANS curriculum: neurodiversity, neurodivergent, neurotypical, information processing.

The neurodiversity “woodland metaphor”

A neurodiversity metaphor needed to draw on something that would be **familiar** to children living in different places and in different life circumstances. It also needed to **avoid strong value associations**. Neither neurotypicality nor neurodivergence should be seen as “better”, more desirable, or more useful than the other.

We chose **trees** as being both familiar, and not invoking obvious *value judgements*. To the majority of people, a willow tree is not inherently “better” or “worse” than a beech tree—they are only different, though we are in no doubt that both of them are trees. We represent the school setting with a **woodland**, rather than a park or a garden, to avoid any implication of certain trees (i.e. types of people) being preferentially chosen over others as more desirable or appropriate for being in that space.



Finally, you might notice that we refer to the less common trees – the willow trees and pines - as having a **hard time growing** in the woodland. It is important that when talking about neurodiversity and learning to accept differences between people, that we don't end

up minimising the impact of those differences. We want to recognise the struggles some children face in school and so that's reflected in the woodland metaphor too.

1.4 “Neurodiversity is new”

Story

Whole class (teacher-led)

Time estimate: 30 minutes



Please deliver this activity as written.

Key Points addressed

1. **Neurodiversity means that we are all different in how we think, feel, and learn, because our brains are different.** Neurodiversity includes everyone, because everyone has a brain!
2. **Differences between people’s brains can be little differences, or big differences.** Most people have brains that are only a little different from one another, and they are called neurotypical. However, some people’s brains have big differences compared to *neurotypical* brains. People with “more different” brains like these are called *neurodivergent*.
3. **Neurodivergent people are also different from each other.** Sometimes, we use labels to describe patterns of differences, such as *dyslexia*, *dyspraxia*, *ADHD*, or *autism*. Neurodivergent people might have one of these labels, or several, or none at all!
4. **How I choose to treat other people in class can make a big difference to how they feel and how their school day goes.**

We recommend delivering this story following video **1.3** as closely as possible, as it includes the fictional pupils trying to make sense of neurodiversity information. They have a range of opinions—including disbelieving or negative opinions. Your own class may have some of the same questions.

Materials

- LEANS story booklet
- Unit 1 PowerPoint. The story **1.4** slides show illustrations of key story scenes supported by captions

Pre-delivery preparation

Time estimate: 10 minutes

Download the story materials. Review the story, and make any amendments if needed for ethics and safety reasons.

Instructions

Optional: review the earlier Unit 1 slides for story **1.2**, if you wish to review the characters with your class before presenting the new story.

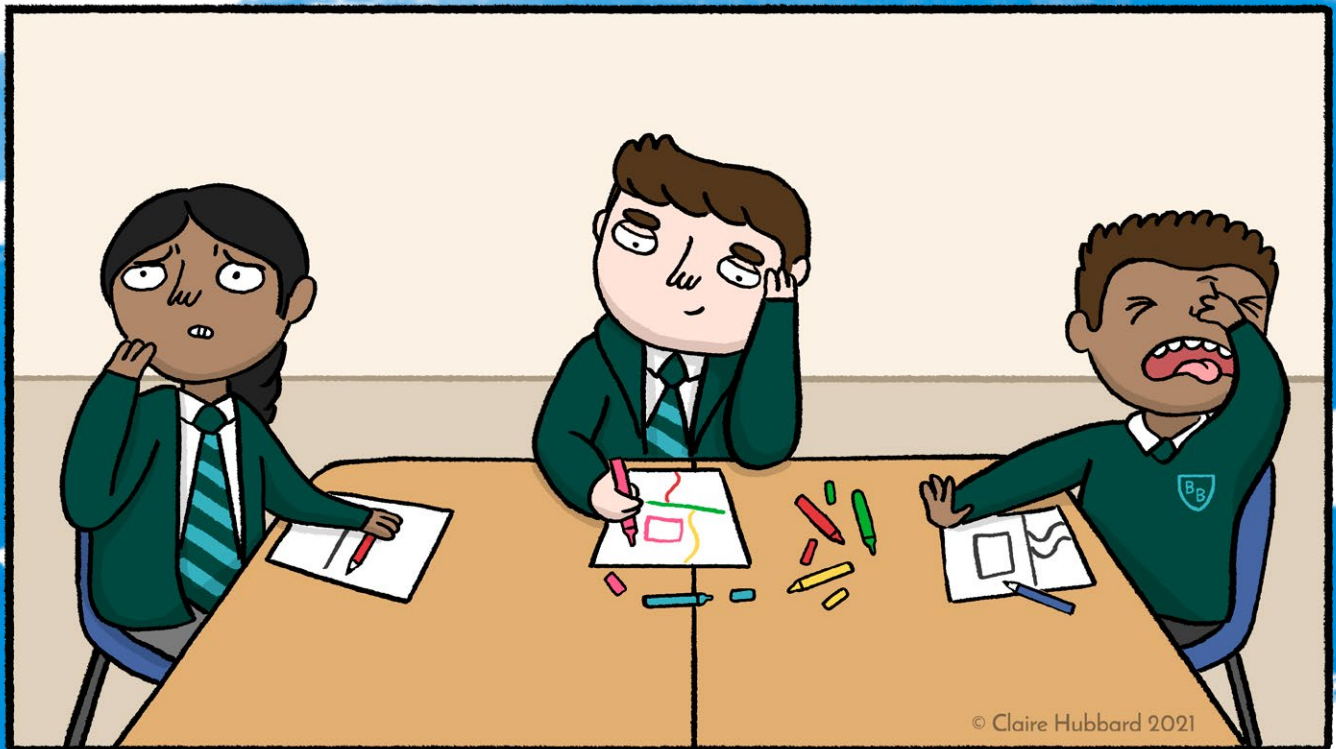
Display the story PowerPoint as you read the story to the class, advancing to the next illustration where marked in the text. This story contains **discussion questions** for your class.





Unit 2

Learning and thinking differently



Unit 2 summary for teachers

Delivery time estimate for Unit 2: 1 hr 20 min to 1 hr 45 min

What is this unit about?

This unit begins to explore how neurodiversity-related differences and experiences can play out in different school activities and spaces. Unit 2 sets pupils up for more specific topics in the later units, by solidifying their understanding of the new content introduced in Unit 1, and concretely illustrating what ideas like “information processing” can mean in relation to classroom tasks.

The story content focuses on showing perspectives and specific experiences that neurodivergent and neurotypical pupils might have during school—even during the same lessons! As noted in Part 3, section 1, perspective-taking and exposure to unfamiliar experiences is a crucial purpose of the stories. They aren’t only about imparting factual information.

Unit 2: Learning and thinking differently is structured around the following Key Points [KP]:

5. **We all learn and think differently, because our brains process information differently.** “Learning and thinking” includes things like remembering, paying attention, writing, and coming up with ideas.
6. **Just like neurodivergent people have “more different” brains, so the differences in how they think and learn are bigger too.** They may find some things very easy, very hard, or just different compared to neurotypical people.
7. **Even when my class all does the same activity, other people are not always having the same experience that I am.**
8. **What I need in order to focus and learn at school may be different to what other people need.** Having different learning needs is OK.

The resource items in this unit are:

2.1 “Same lessons, different experiences” [Story, KP5-8]

- Following from Unit 1, we hear more about class members and their very different relationships to school. We go “inside people’s heads” to understand their experiences in a poetry lesson and a PE lesson.

2.2 The Mind’s Eye [Activity, KP5, 7]

- A concrete, visual demonstration of information processing differences in action.
- Pupils follow step-by-step verbal instructions to create a unique drawing.
- In a class discussion, reflect on how we interpreted information differently, and reflect on the many types of demands and processing involved in the activity beyond “drawing” (e.g. listening to instructions)

2.3 “Drawing new conclusions” [Story, KP5-8]

- Mr. Oliver’s class does *The Mind’s Eye* drawing activity, but find it tricky for different reasons.
- Following the drawing activity, Mr. Oliver explains how some of those differences in our experiences are related to neurodiversity and information processing.

Unit 2 classroom poster (available for download)



2.1 “Same lessons, different experiences”

Story

Whole class (teacher-led)

Time estimate: 15 minutes



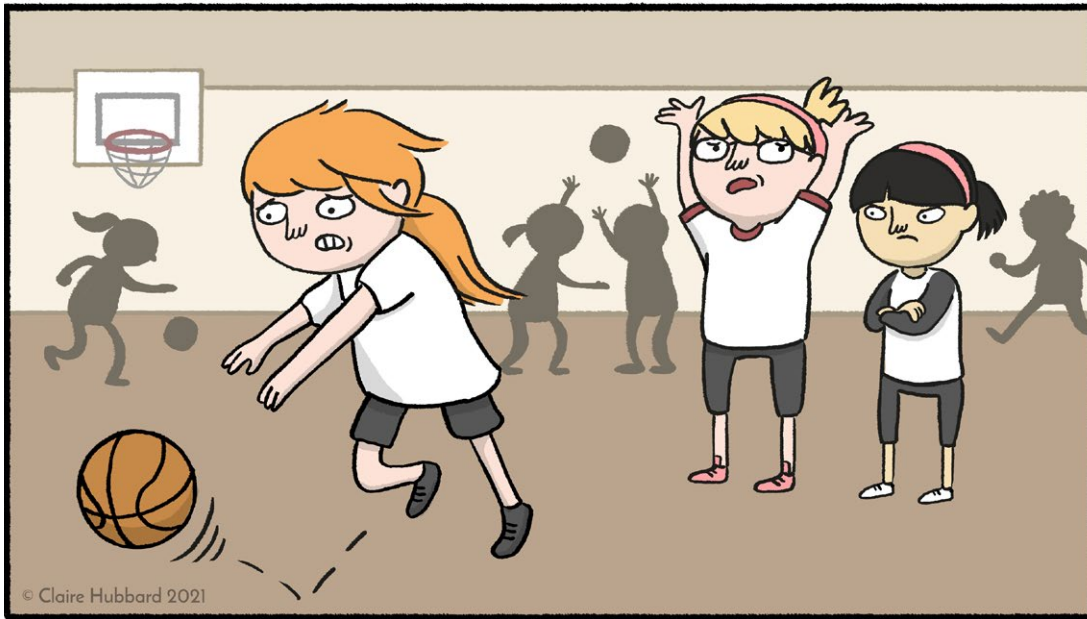
Please deliver this activity as written.

Key Points addressed

5. **We all learn and think differently, because our brains process information differently.** “Learning and thinking” includes things like remembering, paying attention, writing, and coming up with ideas.
6. **Just like neurodivergent people have “more different” brains, so the differences in how they think and learn are bigger too.** They may find some things very easy, very hard, or just *different* compared to neurotypical people.
7. **Even when my class all does the same activity, other people are not always having the same experience that I am.**
8. **What I need in order to focus and learn at school may be different to what other people need.** Having different learning needs is OK.

Downloadable materials

- LEANS story booklet
- Unit 2 PowerPoint. The story **2.1** slides show illustrations of key story scenes supported by captions



Pre-delivery preparation

Time estimate: 10 minutes

Download the story materials. Review the story, and make any amendments if needed for ethics and safety reasons.

Instructions

Display the story PowerPoint as you read the story to the class, advancing to the next illustration where marked in the text. This story contains additional discussion questions.

From here on, it's increasingly important that pupils start to remember who the characters are, because the Unit 2 stories set up action in subsequent stories. Please review them if your class needs it!

2.2. The Mind's Eye

Mixture of individual and whole class, teacher-facilitated

Time estimate: 40-60 minutes

Activity



Please deliver this activity as written.

Key Points addressed

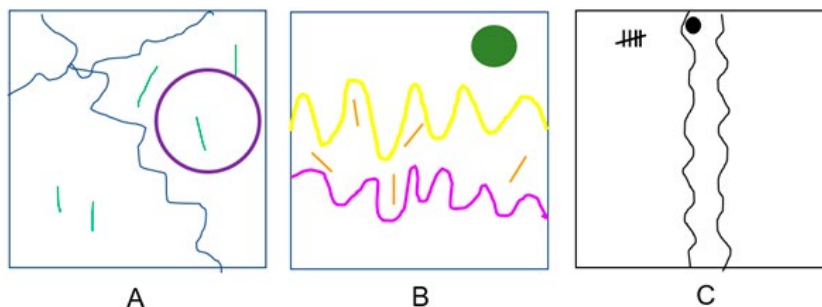
5. **We all learn and think differently, because our brains process information differently.** “Learning and thinking” includes things like remembering, paying attention, writing, and coming up with ideas.
7. **Even when my class all does the same activity, other people are not always having the same experience that I am.**

Summary

This arts-based activity asks pupils to create individual drawings by following step-by-step verbal or written instructions. Though everyone hears the same instructions, everyone will create a unique drawing as they *interpret* what they hear. For example, you might read out:

1. *Draw two wavy lines that go from one side of the paper to the other.*
2. *Draw a circle above one of the lines.*
3. *Draw 5 short lines.*

Pupils A, B, and C might interpret the instructions and draw the following,



People's attention, motor skills, and memory, and preferences will all affect their final drawing. There is no "right answer" that pupils are trying to produce—everyone's drawing is the right answer for them. When your class's varied drawings are revealed, it's an immediate and memorable demonstration. Indeed, one of the LEANS contributors vividly remembered doing a similar activity over 20 years before!

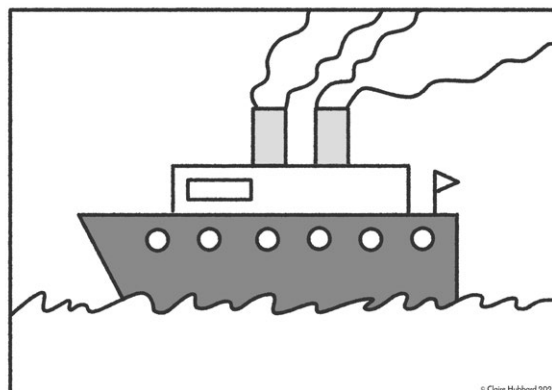
While pupils produce individual drawings, their value is *collectively* illustrating the differences present across your class, and creating a concrete starting point for a discussion of information processing and neurodiversity.



This activity is not a simulation of what neurodivergence or any diagnosis "is like". No LEANS activities try to do that. It tries to illustrate a larger point about the presence of information processing differences between people.

Materials

- Drawing materials and paper for each child
 - On paper smaller than A5, differences will become harder to see when all drawings are viewed together¹⁷.
 - Avoid wet or smeary media like paints, charcoal or chalk! The drawings need to be gathered up immediately at the end of the activity.
- Original line drawing and step-by-step drawing instructions. *We include two options for you to choose from—one example is shown below*
- Whiteboard or large paper to record discussion contributions



¹⁷ Approximately half of an 8.5 x 11" sheet

Pre-activity preparation

Time estimate: 15-20 minutes

- Review activity instructions
- Prepare/collect art materials
- If you wish to display the drawing instructions one step at a time in addition to/ instead of reading them out, create a visual to display the steps.

Teaching points to think about

Pupils especially concerned about “being right” (or wrong)

If members of your class tend to get very anxious about getting things right or about knowing what to do (as the LEANS character Rashida does), this might best be addressed by how you frame the activity at the start. For example, referring to this activity as a “drawing game” might be less anxiety-inducing than calling it an art lesson. Emphasising that there are no right or wrong “answers”, no names, and no marking may reassure some pupils. At the end, they will all be gathered up and no one else will know which one is theirs!

Our design team suggested that using a pencil and eraser (rather than markers) or even a small whiteboard could also be reassuring: they have capacity to change perceived mistakes.

Instructions

Part 1: Introducing the activity

Introduce *The Mind’s Eye* as an art lesson, where everyone will make their own drawing—based on instructions that they will hear (or read) one step at a time.

Inform the class that this may be different than other art activities they have done. They’re not drawing a specific thing, but you can’t draw whatever you want either!

A teacher contributing to LEANS highlighted how easy it would be for pupils to see the drawing stage as “just colouring,” and not pay particular attention to the details of the activity or their own experience. **We encouraged you to clearly communicate that this is part of a lesson, and that you will all be talking about the drawings at the end, and what it was like to do them.** When we draw, we’re working toward a discussion.

Don't give away that everyone's drawings are *expected* to turn out differently, or that the discussion at the end will be about differences! Part of the impact is that pupils are likely to be surprised when all the drawings are revealed.

In addition to any general ground rules you have for LEANS sessions, the activity has the following special rules:

- Don't put your name on your paper. We are anonymous artists today!
- Any paper orientation is OK—both ways are right.
- Any colours are OK (and you can use multiple colours).
- If you miss a step or think you "messed up", please keep going on the same drawing.
- Please only draw what the instructions say, and don't add any extra things.
- Don't look at your neighbour's drawing while we are making them.
- We will look at all the drawings at the end. It's not OK to comment on or criticise other people's drawings.

NOTE: A mix of paper orientations and colours will make the drawings look even more varied, which helps support the point of the activity!

Part 2: Individual drawings and drawings display

Once the class is ready with their materials, announce the total number of drawing steps.

Read out the numbered steps one at a time (or display text for one step at a time), pausing between each step so pupils can draw.

If pupils have questions about the drawing steps...

- Repeating an instruction is not a problem, but *you should not give further explanation or give any guidance on whether pupils are "right" or "wrong"*.
- If someone is unsure about an instruction, ask them to draw what they think it means.

After all steps are complete, gather up the class's drawings, and set them aside temporarily.

Ask your class to make a **prediction**:

Everyone heard the same instructions. Do you think the drawings will look mostly the same as one another, or mostly different?

Take a show of hands or other type of vote. Ask a small number of pupils to explain their predictions (or share with a partner, etc.).

Now, display all the drawings where the class can easily see them. Give everyone several minutes to look at the collection of drawings and discuss with each other.

You might need to remind people of ground rules at this stage, e.g. about whether or not it is OK to comment on other people's drawings.

Part 3: Summative discussion and connecting back to neurodiversity

Follow up on the predictions. For those who expected sameness, are they surprised? For those who expected difference, are the real drawings as different as they expected? Hear a few reactions, and then move on to the main discussion.

The goal is to take your class through these four main ideas by the end of your discussion:

1. This drawing activity wasn't "just drawing"! We had to do many things at the same time, like listening, remembering, controlling a pen, and ignoring distractions.
2. Those things we did are all controlled by our brains, and are all examples of information processing. When we did this activity, we had to process lots of information.
3. Our class's neurodiversity (differences in information processing across the group) is a reason that everyone's drawings are different, even when we did "the same" activity.
4. Drawing isn't special, or an exception! Information processing happens *all the time*, whatever we are doing. So, our experiences and outputs in other activities will be different too.

Discussion goal 1: The drawing activity wasn't "just drawing"

Explain that the class will think about *what kinds of things* happened during the drawing activity, to help understand why the drawings were so different at the end.

Ask one or more pupils to describe *exactly* what they did during the activity. *Alternately, they could discuss this with partners first, before you solicit ideas.*

Note down some responses on the board, so that people can look at everything they have generated and get a sense of just how much was really going on when they were "just drawing!"

It's most useful to record responses with words like...

- Listening, hearing, looking
- Choosing, deciding, planning
- Paying attention, getting distracted
- Remembering, forgetting
- Holding pens, moving pen
- Stopping self from doing something

If pupils get stuck on "drawing", try to unpack that more. What does a person need to do in order to draw? You might then get more useful suggestions like "picking up a pen" or "deciding what to draw".

Get pupils to reflect on **how many of these things were all happening at once** during the drawing activity—for example, they might have been remembering your instructions, choosing where to put a circle, ignoring a whispering neighbour, and holding a pen all at the same time!

Discussion goal 2: Our brain was controlling things

Help pupils to make the connection that **our brains control all of these things**. *Depending on your class's brain knowledge and whether you added extra brain content to Unit 1, it may make more sense to tell your class this connection rather than getting them to come up with it themselves.*

In the connection-making, it's particularly important to address:

- That the brain controls *motor movements* such as picking up, holding, and moving a pen.
- That the brain helps *stop us from doing things*, as well as helping us do them.
- The brain helps us pay attention, but also *not pay attention*, for example trying to "tune out" noises outside when our teacher is talking.

Connect your class's list of activities (during the drawing process) to **information processing** terminology.

Stress that while "listening to what my teacher says" might seem like it's processing information, "information" here isn't about words or instructions—it's about what's going on in your brain. All of the things on our list are examples of information processing!

In this lesson, we were doing many things at once. Our brains were working really hard!

Discussion goal 3: Connecting to neurodiversity terms, idea of the class as neurodiverse

Help your class to remember the connection between the concept of **information processing**, and **neurodiversity**. How are those connected, and how does the connection help explain our drawings?

You and your class might follow this chain of connections:

- All of the things we were doing during the activity—like listening to some things, ignoring others, planning where to draw next—were examples of **information processing**.
- We use the word **neurodiversity** to describe differences in **processing information**, within a group. *This is a good place to reiterate that neurodiversity describes groups, not individuals!*
- Our class is a **neurodiverse group**, so our class's drawings all look different.

Discussion goal 4: Information processing happens all the time

Zoom out one more step to a general point about our learning and thinking: what we talked about today does not only apply to this activity, or to drawing!

We are doing these same types of information processing all the time during the school day (and every day)—things like paying attention/ignoring things, understanding speech, controlling a pen or pencil. So, what we think and feel and do in other activities will be different too.

Connect to **Key Point 5**:

We all learn and think differently. "Learning and thinking" includes things like remembering, paying attention, writing, and coming up with ideas.

2.3 “Drawing new conclusions”



Whole class (teacher-led)

Time estimate: 25 minutes



Please deliver this activity as written.

Key Points addressed

5. **We all learn and think differently, because our brains process information differently.** “Learning and thinking” includes things like remembering, paying attention, writing, and coming up with ideas.
6. **Just like neurodivergent people have “more different” brains, so the differences in how they think and learn are bigger too.** They may find some things very easy, very hard, or just *different* compared to neurotypical people.
7. **Even when my class all does the same activity, other people are not always having the same experience that I am.**
8. **What I need in order to focus and learn at school may be different to what other people need.** Having different learning needs is OK.

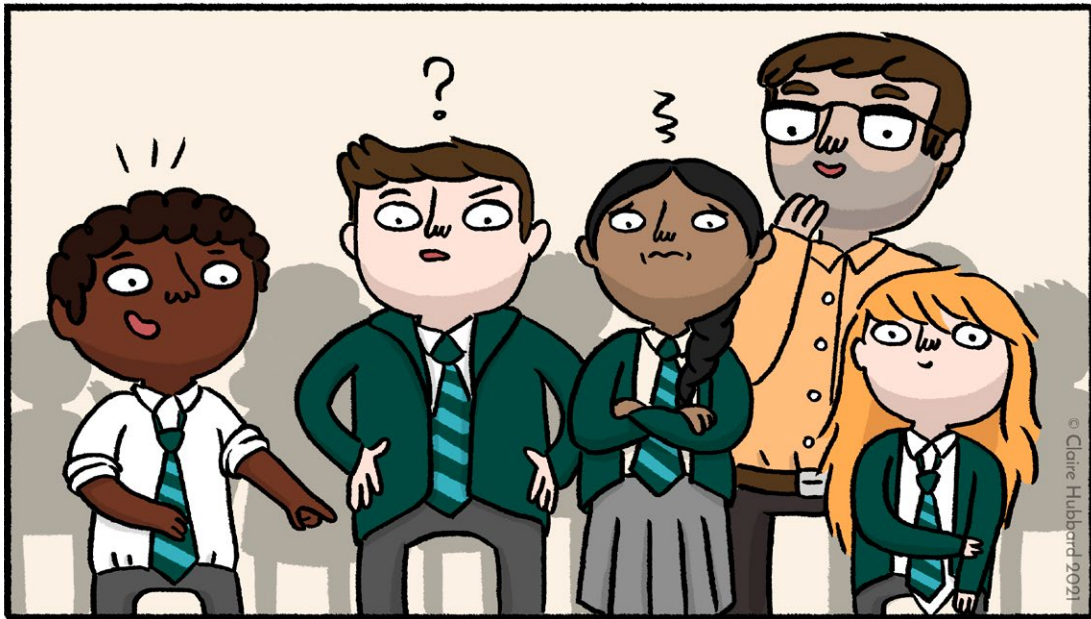
Downloadable materials

- LEANS story booklet
- Unit 2 PowerPoint. The **2.3** story slides show illustrations of key story scenes supported by captions

Pre-delivery preparation

Time estimate: 10 minutes

Download the story materials. Review the story, and make any amendments if needed for ethics and safety reasons.



Instructions

Display the story PowerPoint as you read the story to the class, advancing to the next illustration where marked in the text.

We suggest having a more open discussion at the end of the story, asking for general reflections on Unit 2. This can help solidify the class's grasp of the neurodiversity and information processing ideas from Unit 1, and Unit 2's connections on how they apply to daily school activities.

Unit 3

Communication and understanding



Authors' note on Unit 3: Why is communication so important?

Unit 3 is the longest unit in LEANS, and it's helpful to know that going in. **We feel the length is worth it for understanding neurodiversity at school.** In the first phase of LEANS where our team developed the topics and Key Points, it was extremely clear that **communication is central to neurodivergent school experiences, and intimately connected to all other LEANS topics.** This is a really big area where neurotypical and neurodivergent experiences may diverge.

For many neurodivergent children in particular, verbal and/or nonverbal communication can be a constant source of stress and anxiety. Challenges will be variable: A child may struggle to produce speech—or might know exactly what to say, but always be in trouble for volume, tone, or “attitude”. Their preferred means of communication may be seen as invalid or inappropriate. Repeated failures of communication can be incredibly corrosive over time, and children may be (however unintentionally) sent the message that faults are all on their side.

Conversely, other pupils may feel like much of their communication is automatic, or “just happens”. They may be unaware of how hard others are working to understand and be understood.

The **Unit 3 activities** aim to complicate communication in productive ways, and draw attention to the fact that communication isn't automatic or magical—it's based on information, and we already know that people process information differently!

The two activities are inverses of one another, coming at communicating information from different directions. In the first, we try to interpret actors' nonverbal “communication clues” in a silent film clip (**3.2**). We're likely to get it wrong! In the second activity, we have to give clues to others in a performance (**3.3**). Now the tables are turned, and others are unlikely to have understood us, even when we thought we were being very clear!

Together, they try to make pupils think more about communication as a two-way street, where miscommunications may be due to underlying information processing differences. There may be absent information, or we may not see or understand each other's clues.

In our evaluation study, classes experienced these two activities very differently. For example, the scenes activity was a runaway favourite in some classes, and disliked in others! No activity will fit every class equally well. **We encourage you to try both activities, to give the greatest number of pupils the chance to see their own and others' communication in a new way.**

Unit 3 summary for teachers

Delivery time estimate for Unit 3: 3 hrs to 4.5 hrs

What is this unit about?

This unit focuses on communication and miscommunication. It takes a broad view of what communication is, and draws particular attention to its nonverbal elements. The activities heavily use the idea of people expressing and interpreting “communication clues”. Understanding others requires information—and we already know from Units 1 and 2 that people process information differently. The stories touch on further communication conflicts, such as assuming a quiet classmate has nothing to say, and conflicts over which modalities of communication are “right” or “wrong”.

An important takeaway from the unit is that our differences in information processing can be at the root of miscommunications that we might otherwise have attributed to “not listening”, lack of effort, or deliberate bad intent. They can happen even when both people are paying attention and trying hard—we may not see or understand each other’s communication clues! This unit encourages children to pause and consider before making assumptions about what others mean, or why miscommunication is happening.

Unit 3: Communication and understanding is structured around the following Key Points [KP]:

9. **Communication with other people is about information processing.** We need to interpret information from people’s faces, body, words, and more, and they are processing information from us.
10. **Different people may find it easier or harder to communicate in certain ways.** All ways of communicating are useful and important, even if those ways might not be the same ones the people around me are using.
11. **We may not be able to automatically tell what other people are thinking or trying to communicate, if they communicate in a different way than we do.** If we make assumptions, we might get it wrong. It can be OK to ask people for more information.

The resource items in this unit are:

3.1 Communication brainstorm [Optional warm-up, KP 9]

- In this optional warm-up activity, challenge your class to think of as many types of communication as they can. What else is there, beyond words?

3.2 Silent film detectives [Activity, KP 9]

- As a class or in small groups, pupils see short clips from silent films, and are challenged to look for “communication clues” for what may be happening and how people are feeling. They need to use clues to justify their interpretations.
- Post-activity discussion connects back to the concept of information processing.

3.3 Ambiguous scenes [Activity, KP 9, 11]

- In pairs or trios, pupils create short scenes based on ambiguous scripts that don’t identify a setting, characters, or stage directions. They’re challenged to clearly convey who they are and what is happening.
- Pupils present to peers, and may find that what they *thought* they communicated is not the same as what others understood!

3.4 “You’re not listening!” [Story and unit discussion, KP 9-11]

- Mr. Oliver’s class tries the ambiguous scenes activity. Different groups run into problems with people “not listening” or hurting each others’ feelings. Mr. Oliver and Mrs. Adeyemi step in to talk to the upset people, and help them reflect on what happened and why.
- A **summative discussion for Unit 3** follows the story, connecting communication, information processing and neurodiversity. It poses two “communication challenges” for things to try when miscommunications happen.

3.5 Communication reflection [Activity, KP 10]

- Opportunity for brief personal reflection on KP10, for example, “what ways of communicating are hard or easy for me?”
- This is meant to be a flexible activity that teachers can easily fit to any reflective practices (e.g. journaling) that they already use.

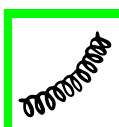
Unit 3 classroom poster (*available for download*)

3.1 Communication brainstorm



Individuals, groups or whole-class

Time estimate: 10 minutes



This activity is flexible and can be adapted.

Key Points addressed

None (preparation to engage with KP 9-11).

Summary

The purpose of this warm-up activity is to get people thinking about communication methods, and to go beyond the “talking” and “writing” options that might immediately come to mind! Considering less widespread methods of communication (e.g. sign languages, Morse code) can make useful points about not every means of communication being equally accessible or understandable to every person.

While this activity is optional we would encourage you to do it if you can, even as a 10-minute preface to activity 3.2.

Instructions

Use one or a series of **discussion questions** to get your class (or small groups) generating ideas for different types of communication. For example,

“How many kinds of communication can you think of?”

“How many ways can we communicate information and feelings to other people?”

Record the suggestions (e.g. making a list on a whiteboard or poster) to help pupils reflect, or ask groups to record their own suggestions.

If people are generating only closely related options, **prompt them** with a few questions or examples that might help broaden their suggestions. For example:

- Can you think of other types of communication that do/don't use X?
- What about communicating our feelings?
- What about communicating ideas or instructions?
- What if I returned your work with a big star on it? Would you think I was trying to tell you something? What would it be?
- Say a common phrase such as "good job" or "thank you" in two different tones of voice, or combined with 2 very different types of body language. Do you think those mean the same thing? Why or why not, and how did you decide?

Before moving on, briefly ask your class to **reflect on their lists**. Is there anything they notice? Anything surprising?

If you can, draw special attention to the following:

1. There are many types of communication that don't have to do with verbal speech, writing, or symbols.
2. Not everyone can understand or use every type of communication option. There may be methods that people don't know at all, and others that they can use incompletely or inconsistently. *e.g. how many people in class know a signed language such as BSL or Makaton? What about feeling confident drawing a map to give someone directions?*

Communication suggestions

- | | |
|--|---|
| • Handwriting, typing, texting | • Crying |
| • Speaking (verbally) | • Singing, rapping |
| • Sign languages, Makaton | • Numbers |
| • Facial expressions | • Mime |
| • Body language | • Smoke signals |
| • Dance | • Semaphore |
| • Tone and volume of voice | • Morse code |
| • Conventional gestures like waving, thumbs up | • Visual art such as painting, sculptures, photography |
| • Laughter | • Symbols that aren't letters or numbers (such as hearts, stars, arrows, emojis!) |
| • Braille | • Signage (such as road signs with symbols) |
| • Text-to-speech devices, AAC | • Graphs and charts |
| • PECS and symbol exchange systems | • Maps |
| • Clothing, hairstyles, uniforms | |
| • Colour-coding (e.g. red for stop or danger, green for go or OK...) | |

3.2 Silent film detectives

Activity

Individuals, groups or whole-class

Time estimate: 45-60 minutes



Please deliver this activity as written.

Key Points addressed

9. **Communication with other people is about information processing.** We need to interpret information from people's faces, body, words, and more, and they are processing information from us.

Summary

Materials

- Teacher list of film clips with links and notes. Clips are 20-40 seconds each.
 - *Examples are free and viewable online through the British Film Institute (BFI) Archive. No login needed to view. Not downloadable.*
 - *Your exact choice of film clips can be adapted—the activity does not depend on particular examples. See our tips on the film links document.*
- Device connected to a projector or large screen, to display the clips (*no speakers needed, all clips are silent*).
- Internet connection to access film clips, if using the suggested clips
- Printable notes forms for pupils (*1 per pupil; 2 per pupil if you are discussing 3 or more clips*).
- Optional: Film synopses document (downloadable resource)

Pre-activity preparation

Time estimate: 15-20 minutes

Note: this preparation pertains to the teacher only, not pupils

1. From the teacher film clips document, view the suggested film clips and select two, if you don't wish to use them all. *Alternately, select your own clips from another source.*

2. Choose the order in which you wish to present the clips. If you think one may be easier for your class, put it first.
3. For each film clip you select, write a few notes about possible communication clues, to prompt your class if they get stuck!

Hint: Don't read the film synopses ahead of time. It may be harder to help your class focus on evidence **within the clip**, if you already have extra information about the plot!

Teaching points to think about

Ideas that are important later in the unit and in LEANS

With respect to the larger picture of LEANS, it's very useful to draw pupils' attention **to what and how much we can communicate non-verbally with our faces and bodies**. Many pupils may intuitively fixate on words as more important, or more informative, or more useful.

This is also a literal example of "**seeing things differently**": Even when we watch the same film clip, we may not *notice* the same aspects, or come to the same conclusions about what they mean. The unit discusses this in terms of noticing and interpreting "communication clues". Once again, it's due to **differences in our information processing [Key point 9]**, discussed here and at the end of **3.4** (whole-unit discussion).

Format: why start with evidence, not interpretations?

Discussions first ask children what communication clues they noticed, and then what these may mean. Why?

1. Children will have *noticed* different things within the clip. Beginning by stating people's clues broadens the information available to everyone, and also sets up a later discussion point about how this activity is an example of **differences in our information processing**.
2. The emphasis on needing to explicitly *state* clues means that if one person makes a contribution that classmates feel is "obvious" or "not important", you can point back to the activity structure. The person is doing exactly what we need right now, which is stating *all* the evidence.
3. If you begin with an interpretation question like "what happened in this clip?" the group can easily get locked in to considering one possible interpretation, without considering other clues or competing interpretations. Awareness of the communication ambiguity in the clips is important in itself.

Instructions

Part 1: Teacher-led introduction and managing expectations

Introduce the upcoming activity to your class, stating that they will be **silent film detectives**. You might say something like:

*"We will watch some short clips from old silent films. This means they were made without any sound. We don't have any words to help tell us what is happening, so we must be **detectives** look for other '**communication clues**' from the actors and the setting.*

*Just like real detectives, we need to need to look for clues and evidence, and record what we find. Then, we will **use our clues** to reason about what is happening in the scene and why. The most important thing is to use the communication clues, not to find one right answer."*

If your class did not do **warm-up activity 3.1**, remind your class about the different types of things that could be **communication clues**. Draw special attention to non-verbal means of communication (e.g. facial expressions, how people are moving, costumes and uniforms...many options!).

In addition to any general ground rules you have for LEANS sessions, the activity has the following special rules and information:

- That this is not a quiz! There are no points, and nobody wins.
- Introduce any guidance about ways in which it is/is not appropriate to react to or comment on peers' ideas.
- The different detectives in our class might not agree on which communication clues are most important, or what they mean, *and that is OK*.

Based on testing this activity, we encourage you to...

Manage expectations about silent films: The sound and dialogue are not “missing”. The film was made that way! Actors had to show the audience what’s going on, using other communication cues.

Manage expectations about the level of detail needed:

- We **are not** trying to reconstruct the scene or the film!
- General clues are enough—what type of expressions and movements? What type of people and place?
- Pupils **don’t** need to worry about exact plot points, characters’ exact roles/relationships, or exact locations.



For example, in the clip from *The Tower of London* (1926), pupils might notice clues like:

- They’re outside, maybe in a garden.
- Fancy and important **costumes**. Maybe they are royalty?
- The man in the centre seems like he is **pointing and gesturing**, telling other people where to stand and what to do
- We see **bowing, curtsying, and hand-kissing**

Pupils might use that evidence to suggest an interpretation like “*the man in the middle is introducing people to the queen*”. That level of interpretation is **useful for discussion** in this activity.

Part 2. Viewing each clip

Introduce the note-taking sheet (downloadable resource) and explain the **basic format** for viewing each clip: **Watch-think-watch-discuss**.

1. Watch the clip through, looking for communication clues.
2. Give individual “quiet thinking time” and/or note-taking time to record their clues in Box 1 on the note-taking sheet.
3. Watch the clip again
4. Have an additional round of quiet thinking time to add clues to Box 1, and possible interpretations to Box 2. Then, discuss.

Before starting a new video clip, help pupils focus their watching by posing the **question** from Box 1 of the notes sheet:

“What communication clues did you notice?”

Remind them that we are starting with clues (Box 1), and then will think about interpretations, based on our clues (Box 2).

Please **do not give the title of the film, or a title for the clip**, as that may detract from the focus on using bottom-up “communication clues” within the clip itself.

Part 3. Discussing each clip

The format of the discussion is to **pool people’s evidence** (what communication clues did you see?), and then **discuss and interpret the evidence** (based on the clues, what do you think is happening?).

This order of operations may be challenging for some pupils. They may have a clear interpretation of what happened—but be less sure of what they saw that makes them think so!

Gathering evidence

Ask pupils to volunteer communication clues. Record contributions from as many people as you can, looking for different types of evidence.

If pupils seem stuck, prompt them about different elements such as facial expressions, gestures, setting, costumes.... Alternately, call back to examples from warm-up activity **3.1** (if completed).

Pupils may want to **challenge other people’s evidence**, e.g. that is not communication, that wasn’t in the film, etc. Use your judgement about how best to address this: Will *all* contributions go on the list, or are (respectful) challenges a good opportunity for discussion?

If pupils jump to interpretations... Re-direct them toward communication clues, e.g. *"what did you see that makes you think that?"*.

Interpretation

Move on to **interpreting the clip**. The biggest challenge here may be for pupils to link their interpretations to the evidence identified in the previous step.

Pose a starting question like *"If we put the clues together, what do we think that could mean?"*

Remind your class that "interpretation" isn't just having an idea, but about using the communication clues. A **good answer** is one that used the evidence!

Optional: pupils share interpretations with a partner or their table before the whole-class discussion.

Hear the first interpretation and discuss it briefly, focusing on its use of the available clues:

- Are there more clues that would support that interpretation?
- What about clues X, Y, Z? do those fit with your interpretation?

Hear several more interpretations, ideally different from the first.

We have provided **synopsis information** for our suggested clips (downloadable resource), but would encourage you not to share it until Part 4, after all clips have been discussed.

Repeat steps 1 and 2 for additional clip(s) before going on to the summative discussion.

We strongly recommend that your class watch **more than one clip**. The process will be more familiar the second time around!

In piloting the activity, **people didn't agree on which clips were harder or easier**. Another clip gives everyone another opportunity to feel successful at the task, or to feel challenged by it. Different clips also present different types of clues.

Part 4. Activity reflection and connections to information processing

NOTE: This unit has a whole-unit discussion following story **3.4**, where there's more discussion of neurodiversity connections, and implications for our actions.

Hear a few **reactions** about the task. For example, were pupils surprised at how much was communicated in a film with no spoken dialogue? What was it like to look for the communication clues, or interpret the scene based on the clues?

The main goal of post-activity reflection is to connect “communication clues” to the information processing vocabulary in Units 1 and 2.

Help pupils begin to make this connection by drawing their attention to (or asking them to generate) **parallels with the Mind’s Eye drawing activity (2.2)**. Try to build on those past insights about what information processing is, and how much of it we’re doing in any activity.

- Like we weren’t “just drawing”, here we weren’t “just watching”!
- **There**, our brains were busy with different types of processing: paying attention to some things and ignoring others, remembering instructions, making decisions. **Here**, we were doing those same things, and also trying to understand what the actors were communicating.
- **There**, our differences in information processing were a reason for our different drawings when we had “the same instructions”. We interpreted them in different ways. **Here**, our differences in information processing are one reason we noticed different clues or thought they had different meanings, even when we watched “the same film clip”.

Explicitly connect to Key Point 9:

9. **Communication with other people is about information processing.**
We need to interpret information from people’s faces, body, words, and more, and they are processing information from us.

It’s really important for children to grasp Key Point 9, that communication is about information processing. If children don’t find the parallels to information processing in activity **2.2**, clear or useful, that is OK, and won’t affect the later discussion.

Optional: Share the synopsis of the film(s)

We have provided **synopses** for the films with clips suggested for LEANS, and marked the approximate location of the suggested clips within the synopses.

Your class will probably find that the “real explanation” of the scene varies from their proposed interpretations. It may be completely unrelated!

Ask for **reactions and comments**. Now that they know more about the film, how well do people think they did at interpreting the clips? Why do they say that? If anyone points out that they were **missing important information** (such as what happened in the film previously, or who the characters were) and would have done 'better' if they knew it, that's a useful insight for the later whole-unit discussion. We're often communicating with incomplete information.

3.3 Ambiguous scenes

Activity

Small group work (pairs or trios) followed by whole-class discussion

Time estimate: 1-2 hours

The total timing is a flexible part of the activity, but pupils will need a minimum of 20 minutes to prepare their scenes. It would be hard to do the whole activity in under 1 hour. Especially if you already have timetabled drama lessons, you could extend the activity over multiple lessons (e.g. rehearsal in one, performance in another).



Please deliver this activity as written.

Key Points addressed

9. **Communication with other people is about information processing.** We need to interpret information from people's faces, body, words, and more, and they are processing information from *us*.
10. **Different people may find it easier or harder to communicate in certain ways.** All ways of communicating are useful and important, even if those ways might not be the same ones the people around me are using.

Summary

This activity is the inverse of the previous silent films activity (3.2) that had only visual cues. Now, pupils receive only words: short, ambiguous scripts with no clues as to *who, what, when, where, or why*. It is up to pupils to decide these things, and then try to perform their scene. Audience members will watch for "communication clues", and have a chance to state their interpretations of the scene.

Most scenes will probably be unclear when performed, which is useful for reflection and discussion. It may surprise some performers that their "obvious" clues were not understood. It may frustrate the audience members if what they understood so clearly is wrong, according to the performers—how can that be?! This artificial situation can still tell us something about intentions, understanding, and misunderstanding in daily life situations.

Main discussion of this activity follows story 3.4.

Materials

This activity needs sufficient **space** for small groups to individually rehearse their scenes (it is very hard to do this seated at a table!). Space is also needed for performance.

- Printed scene script for each group member. All scripts are provided in a single file, with each script on a separate page.
 - 5 script options for 2-person groups
 - 5 script options for 3-person groups
- Printed activity instruction sheet for each small group. *You may wish to add additional details to the handout re: performances.*
- No costumes or props are required. Using furniture is optional.

Pre-activity preparation

Time Estimate: 15 minutes

Note: this preparation pertains to the teacher only, not pupils

1. Choose which of the scripts you would like to use. *For each of these, note down at least one idea of what the scene could be, so you are ready to help a struggling group.*
2. Print scripts and instructions for your groups
3. Depending on your class, you may wish to pre-group pupils to facilitate smoother working.

Instructions

Part 1. Introduction

Give an overview of the activity premise and steps:

- Pairs or trios will each get a short script, and will need to plan how to perform their scene. Scripts don't say who the people are, or where they are, or exactly what is going on! YOU will need to decide what you think is happening.
- You will have [amount of time] to read your script and plan your scene.
- [Some groups] will perform their scene to the class. People in the audience will get to say what they thought was happening in the scene. Then, the performers can tell us about their idea.
- At the end, we will talk about what it was like to do these scenes, and to be an audience member.

In addition to any general ground rules you have for LEANS sessions, the activity has the following special rules and information, that may help manage pupils' expectations of what's expected and what's OK.

- Emphasise that when planning the scene, **they aren't trying to find one "right answer"** to what the script is "really" about. There is no secret list of answers!
- This is not a test, or a competition to have the best scene—no points, winners or losers!
- Emphasise **detective work** (like **3.2**) over performance/acting ability. It's each group's job to *give communication clues*, and the audience's job to *look for the clues* and interpret the scenes. Just like with the silent films!

Example ambiguous scene script

A: Can I have a go?
B: If you want.
A: Where do I start?
B: Right here.
A: Is it difficult?
B: No, not really.
A: Here I go.
B: That's enough.

Part 2. Pupils read and rehearse scenes

Distribute **printed instructions** and **scripts** to each group. Each pupil needs their own copy of the group's script.

Give pupils time and space to plan and rehearse. We recommend **no less than 20 minutes to read and rehearse the scripts**, if you are doing this whole activity in one lesson.

Pupils **do not need to memorise**, reading lines is fine! (The pupil instructions repeat this).

Support time management and keep people moving!

- It's easy to get stuck on the meaning of the script, and not move on to other steps.
- Especially if you have a short rehearsal time (20-30 minutes), help your class by watching the clock and signalling transitions. Displaying a countdown timer could be useful.
- If pupils are stuck, help them with an idea so they can move on (*see pre-activity preparation*).

Part 3. Performance and audience feedback

Have a minimum of two groups present their scenes to the class and hear audience interpretations of the action. (See more performances *if time permits*—you could also do these during a separate lesson slot).

Before any performances, we suggest that you...

- Recap general ground rules about respectful participation, and remind your class again that this is not a competition.
- **Manage expectations** that performers' intentions and audience interpretations may not match perfectly—and this is OK! If mismatches happen, it doesn't mean anyone is wrong or doing a bad job.

We suggest the following steps for each performance:

1. **Performance:** The group presents their whole scene, with no title or explanations beforehand.
2. **Audience interpretation:** hear from at least two audience members about what they think was happening, and why.
3. **Performers explain their scene.** What were they trying to show, and what communication clues did they try to include?

Audience interpretation: As with the silent films activity, encourage audience members to link their interpretation to **communication clues** in the scene. What did they see or hear that made them think X?

Performer explanations: If the intended scene is quite different than what the audience interpreted, encourage them to explain how they tried to show their actions, setting, etc. What kind of communication clues did they try to use? Why those?

The summative Unit discussion (following story **3.4**) relies on the whole process and experience—not any one group's performance. If anyone is really struggling to perform or explain, we'd encourage you to move on.

Part 4: Activity reflection

It's important for story **3.4** and the following whole-unit discussion that pupils see relationships between the ambiguous scenes and more familiar, spontaneous situations.

For your class, quickly **summarise patterns** you observed from the performances and discussion. You are likely to have seen patterns like...

- People didn't always **see/hear** the performers' communication clues—even when performers thought they were doing those things!
- People didn't always **interpret** clues the way the performers intended.
- Some cues meant different things to different people.

Ask your pupils to respond to the following questions (could be verbal or written reflection):

1. We're not actors! Are we still giving other people "communication clues" in everyday life?
2. Watching the scenes, different people saw the same clues, but interpreted them in different ways. Do you think that happens in everyday life?

These last two questions set children up for the whole-unit discussion (resource **3.4**).

It's essential for as many pupils as possible to agree that we are giving communication clues in everyday life, and that differences in interpretation also happen in everyday life.

3.4 “You’re not listening!”

Story +
Unit
discussion

Whole-class (teacher led)

Time estimate: 35-40 minutes for the story; 20-30 minutes for unit discussion



Please deliver this activity as written.

Key Points addressed

9. **Communication with other people is about information processing.** We need to interpret information from people’s faces, body, words, and more, and they are processing information from us.
10. **Different people may find it easier or harder to communicate in certain ways.** All ways of communicating are useful and important, even if those ways might not be the same ones the people around me are using.
11. **We may not be able to automatically tell what other people are thinking or trying to communicate, if they communicate in a different way than we do.** If we make assumptions, we might get it wrong. It can be OK to ask people for more information.

Materials

- LEANS story booklet
- Unit 3 PowerPoint. The **3.4** story slides show illustrations of key story scenes supported by captions

Pre-delivery preparation

Time estimate: 15 minutes

Download the story materials. Review the story, and make any amendments if needed for ethics and safety reasons. Prepare for class discussion.

Instructions: story

Display the story PowerPoint as you read the story to the class, advancing to the next illustration where marked in the text.

Instructions: Unit 3 discussion

In prior Unit 3 discussions, your class should already have covered these points:

1. Communicating with other people is about information processing [3.2]
2. We are giving other people "*communication clues*" in everyday life [3.3]
3. People interpreting the same clues differently *also* happens in everyday life [3.3]

Briefly remind your class of these points if you think it's needed.

Starting from that point, the goal is to take your class through these 2 main ideas by the end of your discussion:

1. Connect communication and information processing to neurodiversity.
2. Talk about *miscommunications* in terms of "communication clues" and information processing.

Goal 1: connecting communication and information processing to neurodiversity.

You could challenge your class: what's the connection between these three ideas? How are they related? If they need help, you could follow this line of reasoning:

- We know that *communication* with other people is about *information processing*. We interpret information from people's faces, body, words, and more--and they are also processing information from us.
- We already know that across a group of people, their brains will not all process information the same way, and we call this *neurodiversity*.
- So, communication differences are an illustration of our class's neurodiversity.

Communication is an area where many neurodivergent people may show differences from neurotypical people, and from each other. For example, remember how differently Simon and Rashida thought about communication in this story!

Make a further connection to what pupils learned in Unit 2, about how people may find different skills and aspects of school harder or easier than others do. In the same way, we get **Key Point 10**,

Different people may find it easier or harder to communicate in certain ways. All ways of communicating are useful and important, even if those ways might not be the same ones the people around me are using.

It's important to highlight that neurodiversity is not the only reason for communication differences. Our culture, personal preferences, and practice with different types of communication also play important roles.

It's also important that children don't equate neurodivergence with being generally *bad* at communication, because that's not true! Neurodivergent people may be more or less skilled at different types, just like neurotypical people.

Transition to goal 2: One result of people communicating in different ways is that sometimes we misunderstand each other.

Goal 2: Talking about *miscommunications* in terms of "communication clues" and information processing.

Ask pupils, "*Can you think of any examples of misunderstandings that happened in this LEANS unit?*" Try to collect 3 different examples.

For each example, ask the class "*Why might that have happened?*"

Guide pupils' explanations **toward** communication clues, information processing, or neurodiversity. If they mention these independently, that's great! "Miscommunication" might happen because...

- People don't notice or don't understand each other's cues.
- There's information that someone doesn't have (just like we didn't know the silent film titles!).
- That type of communication is really hard for one of the people.

Guide explanations away from references to fault, people not paying attention, or being bad at things. Asking pupils to reflect on their own experience of the activities may help re-direct them: they probably didn't get everything right, but was it their *fault*? Why not?

Finish with a clear statement that when we don't understand each other, that doesn't mean anyone is at fault. It may be a result of the differences between us.

Not making assumptions is a step we can take to help forestall miscommunications.

Key Point 11 summarises this:

We may not be able to automatically tell what other people are thinking or trying to communicate, if they communicate in a different way than we do. If we make assumptions, we might get it wrong. It can be OK to ask people for more information.

Try a communication challenge!

Close the unit by asking your class to try two communication challenges over the next days or weeks. Or, you could frame this as making a new commitment, or even as mini-homework!

Challenge 1. If I'm not sure what someone else is trying to communicate, I will politely ask them for more information—not assume what they mean.

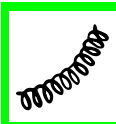
Challenge 2. If I think someone doesn't understand me or isn't listening, I'll think about what the reasons could be. Could this have something to do with us using different communication cues, or using a type of communication that is hard for them (or me)?

3.5 Communication reflection

Activity

Individuals, groups or whole-class

Time estimate: 10+ minutes, depending on your plan



This activity is flexible and can be adapted.

Key Points addressed

10. **Different people may find it easier or harder to communicate in certain ways.** All ways of communicating are useful and important, even if those ways might not be the same ones the people around me are using.

Summary

This is a flexible activity. The goal is for pupils to reflect and identify at least one type of communication that feels easy for them, and at least one that feels harder.

Materials and Pre-activity preparation

Time estimate: 10+ minutes, depending on your activity plan

This activity does not have pre-defined preparation steps. Any steps or creation of materials depends on your class.

In your planning, you may wish to consider:

1. How much time you wish to spend.
2. Whether you would like pupils to **record** their reflection in some way.
3. If your class has any established activities or tools (e.g. reflective writing, journaling) that you could use as a space for this reflection.
4. If not using an existing tool, which reflection format might be most successful and accessible to the widest number of pupils. *Ideas below.*

Teaching points to think about

“How do I know what’s difficult or easy?”

For a range of reasons, some pupils may find it challenging to answer a reflective question like “*what is a type of communication that feels hard for you?*”. They may feel like everything is easy—or is hard, or like they’re not sure how to make this judgement. What does “hard” mean, or feel like inside?

Alternate prompts

Here are some alternative reflective prompts that might help pupils get at the underlying idea of the activity:

- Communication types that feel like they take lots of energy/only a little energy for me
- Communication types that feel like they take lots of practice/not much practice for me
- Types of communication I think I am good at/ not so good at
- If I could choose how to communicate something, what way would I choose? Is there a way I don’t want to use?

When are we communicating? About what?

Some pupils (for example, your autistic pupils) may need a **specific context** in order to answer these questions, e.g. “*what types of communication are hard/ easy for you with **other people in your class**, at **school**?*” To a generic question, they might reasonably say “it depends”!

Some pupils might find it easier to think in terms of **communication situations**, rather than “types” of communication—e.g. it’s hard to communicate when you feel angry, but not so hard to talk to a friend. You could re-orient the whole exercise toward situations if that makes more sense for you and your class.

To share or not to share?



We’d encourage you to think carefully before introducing a public sharing element to this activity, or asking pupils to reflect in pairs (etc). There is obvious scope for negative or dismissive reactions if someone names a challenge, and most other pupils find it easy. This is a particular risk for neurodivergent pupils, who may already find communication a consistently effortful aspect of school.

If you do want to have a sharing element, we’d encourage you to give individual pupils as much control as possible about whether or not they want to share, and with whom.

More options

Choose from a menu

If you think your pupils may struggle to come up with communication types and then make judgements about difficulty, you could offer a “menu” of communication types or situations. The options could recycle communication examples generated in warm-up activity **3.1**.

Communication card-sorting

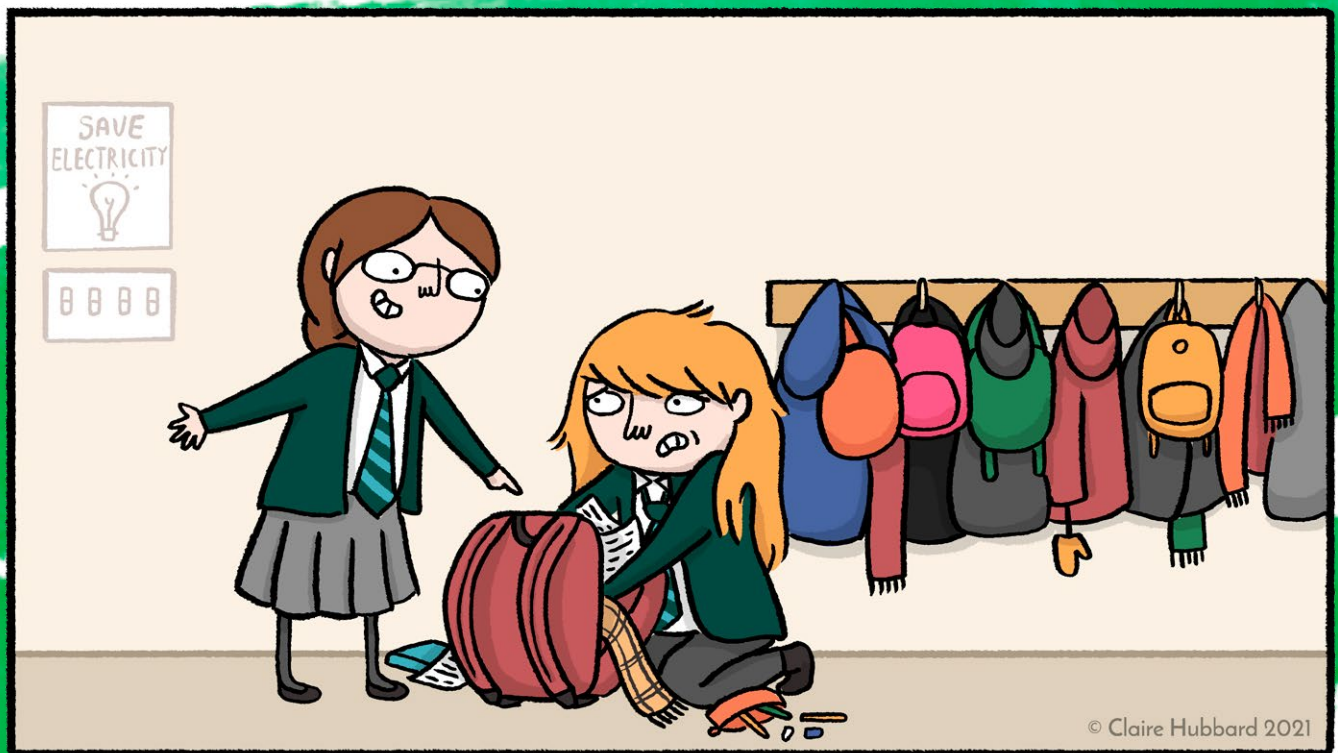
For the same reasons as above, you could also create a paper or virtual **card-sorting task** to support pupils’ reflection. This could be as simple or complex as you (or pupils) want to make it. For example:

- Choosing one example each of easy and hard communication types
- Sorting into three piles for easier-harder-don’t know
- Ranking the relative difficulty of different options.



Unit 4

Getting along together at school



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Unit 4 summary for teachers

Delivery time estimate for Unit 4: 1 hr 45 min to 2 hrs 15 min

What is this unit about?

This unit includes several big concepts (differences between needs and wants, conflicting needs, helping others) that go under an 'umbrella' of getting along with others at school. The scenarios activity and the stories try to make all these concepts as concrete as possible, by linking them to familiar school situations. The unit *does not* give prescriptive advice about "the best" thing to do in different situations, but more generally encourages respect, consideration for others, and speaking to people rather than assuming what they want or need.

A crucial message in this unit is that *situations* can pose problems, but *people* are not problems to be solved—whether they are neurodivergent, seem different, or just have unpopular views. It emphasises that when people's needs conflict, the onus is not automatically on the "different" person to change themselves or downplay their own needs. We all have a role to play in respectfully getting along together at school.

Unit 4: Getting along together at school is structured around the following Key Points [KP]:

12. **Needs and wants aren't the same.** Just because I really want something doesn't make it a need.
13. **What I need may be different than what other people need, and that is OK.** Everyone has things they need to thrive at school and in their life.
14. **Sometimes, people may need opposite things (conflicting needs). That doesn't mean that either person is wrong.** We may need to compromise about what happens in those situations, to try to help everyone the best we can.

The resource items in this unit are:

4.1 “Much ado about posters” [Story, KP4, KP14]

- Mr. Oliver removes some posters with classroom information, to make the environment less distracting for Ibrahim. Morag panics, because she relies on the posters daily.
- A pushy classmate insists on “helping” Morag, leading to bad feeling and a discussion with Mrs. Adeyemi about the class agreements about offering—and declining—help.

4.2 School scenarios [Activity, KP8 revisited from Unit 2, preparation to encounter KP12-14]

- A small-group problem-solving activity where students read about tricky school situations involving LEANS characters, and generate ideas for how they could be resolved.

4.3 Explaining needs and wants [Video resource, KP12, 14]

- A 6.5-minute video contrasting the differences between things we need, and things we want—and that these will be different across people. It stresses that all people have needs at school and in life, and gives concrete examples from school settings.
- Introduces vocabulary of *needs*, *wants*, *conflicting needs*

4.4 “I want, I need” [Story, KP12-13]

- Morag goes to Mr. Oliver, and comes up with a solution to get the posters back.
- One pupil, Declan, needs to be excused from PE due to sound sensitivities, and others get cross because they want to stay behind in class too. Pupils and Mr. Oliver have an impromptu discussion, revisiting the concept of “needs” and “wants”.

Unit 4 classroom poster (*available for download*)

4.1 “Much ado about posters”

Story

Whole-class (teacher led)

Time estimate: 25-30 minutes



Please deliver this activity as written.

Key points addressed

4. **[Repeated from Unit 1] How I choose to treat other people in class can make a big difference to how they feel and how their school day goes.**
Note: this story focuses specifically on the idea of offering help, and how we might respond when others do that.
14. **Sometimes, people may need opposite things (conflicting needs). That doesn't mean that either person is wrong.** We may need to compromise about what happens in those situations, to try to help everyone the best we can.

Materials

- LEANS story booklet
- Unit 4 PowerPoint. The **4.1** story slides show illustrations of key story scenes supported by captions

Pre-delivery preparation

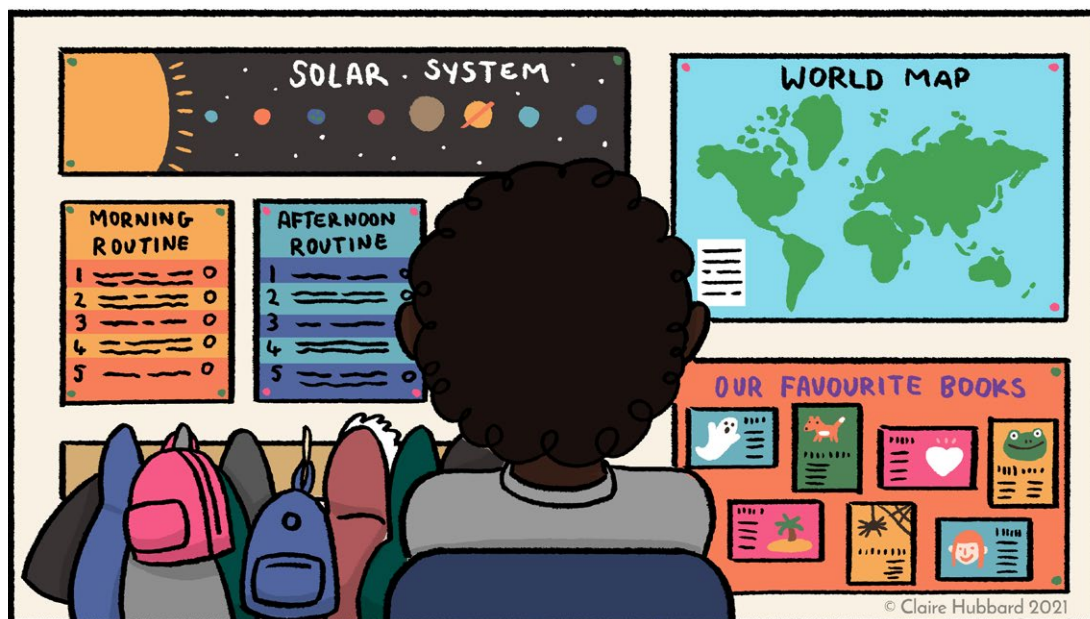
Time estimate: 10 minutes

Download the story materials. Review the story, and make any amendments if needed for ethics and safety reasons.

Instructions

Display the story PowerPoint as you read the story to the class, advancing to the next illustration where marked in the text. This story has additional discussion questions to help unpack what is happening, and why it may be happening.

Story **4.4** includes the final resolution of the events beginning in this story, about how Mr. Oliver accommodates conflicting needs re: posters thanks to a pupil's clever suggestion.



4.2 School scenarios

Combination of whole class and small group work

Time estimate: 45-60 minutes

Activity



Please deliver this activity as written.

Key points addressed

This activity introduces ideas from all of the Unit 4 Key Points, though does not yet include the needs-wants vocabulary. It also revisits a point from Unit 2.

8. **[Repeated from Unit 2] What I need in order to focus and learn at school may be different to what other people need.** Having different learning needs is OK.
12. **Needs and wants aren't the same.** Just because I really want something doesn't make it a need.
13. **What I need may be different than what other people need, and that is OK.** Everyone has things they need to thrive at school and in their life.
14. **Sometimes, people may need opposite things (conflicting needs). That doesn't mean that either person is wrong.** We may need to compromise about what happens in those situations, to try to help everyone the best we can.

Summary

In small groups, pupils discuss short, school-based **scenarios** featuring the LEANS characters. These include a range of classroom needs, experiences, and possible points of peer conflict, some of which are not covered in other LEANS materials. The purpose of this activity is to get pupils thinking about how they interact with others, and how their actions may affect others' ability to learn and thrive.

Each group will consider the options for positive change in their scenario, considering who might be able to help, how they might help, and how people might feel about different courses of action. Some scenarios address issues of what people need or want, in preparation for video **4.3**.

Materials

- Printable pupil instructions (1 page)
- Set of printable half-page **scenario cards** with discussion questions. *These are spaced so the stack of printouts can be easily cut in half with a paper cutter.*
- Teacher guide with activity overview

Pre-activity preparation

Time estimate: 20 minutes

1. Read through the scenario materials. Remove any scenarios that appear to be “too close” to real-life difficulties or conflicts ongoing in your class, or any that may appear to single out particular children for any other reason.
2. Print instructions and scenario “cards” and cut cards apart (each scenario is ½ page).
3. If desired, pre-assign groups and/or scenarios.

About the scenarios

Scenarios were developed to illustrate common **sources of challenge in a neurodiverse classroom**, including:

- **Competing needs**, when two or more people in the class need opposing things. Pupils considering these scenarios will have to think about how they can work together to create a classroom that best fits everyone.
- **Intolerance of differences**, even when those differences may not directly affect another person. Pupils considering these scenarios will have to reflect on what acceptance is and how they can treat each other with more compassion and not expect everyone to “fit in” in the same way.
- **Trying to help, but causing problems unintentionally**. Pupils considering these scenarios will have to think about how even well-intentioned actions could affect others negatively.

If using only a subset of the scenarios, try to choose scenarios that represent different types of needs and possible conflicts. This activity is useful for later LEANS units in terms of making students aware of different types of challenges that their peers may face, or how peers’ needs may interact with their own.

Instructions

Part 1: Whole class introduction and activity demonstration

Discuss the **example scenario** below as a whole class, led by you, in order to model what the activity is about and to make sure students understand the discussion questions. Discussion questions are the same for all scenarios.

Display the scenario and discussion questions up on the board:

Example scenario for whole-class discussion

#1. Declan wears ear defenders in class most of the time.

Anna-Jade says he looks like Princess Leia from Star Wars. Everyone in the class laughs.

Declan stops wearing his ear defenders for the rest of the week, and gets a bad mark on a big test. Mr. Oliver encourages him to start wearing them again, but he says he doesn't want to.

- **How do the people in this story feel?**
- **What might happen next in this situation?**
- **Who can help and how could they make things better?**
- **Could the people in this story have done something different?**

As in the stories, using characters allows discussion of specifics, while being clear they *aren't* about anyone in your class. *These scenarios mention some new names, to allow us to refer to needs not discussed elsewhere in the resources—don't worry about remembering these names!*

Part 2: Small group work

Divide your class into small groups of 3 or 4 pupils, each discussing a different scenario card. The groups will probably want about 10 minutes to read their card, and follow the instructions.

For some scenarios, you may need to remind your students that it's OK to question what the *teacher* does or doesn't do in the scenario—there may be things they could change too (thus the instructions and discussion questions referring to 'people', not pupils).

Part 3: Groups share their ideas

After the group discussions, invite small groups to **share** their scenarios, and explain their proposed solution(s). They could also **act out** their solution, if they wished. *One of our evaluation study classes reported that was particularly popular and well-received!*

We suggest hearing from at least 3-4 groups before moving to a general discussion.

If groups propose any solutions that seem clearly **inappropriate**, use your judgement about challenging or correcting these ideas immediately, versus teasing out those problems in later discussion.

Optional: Other class members can ask questions or give feedback about groups' proposed solutions. Make sure to encourage both positive feedback, and feedback that asks questions or suggests further changes.



Avoiding blame

Explanations in Part 3 may blame neurodivergent (or otherwise different) people in problematic ways, or put the responsibility on them without really considering alternatives. For example:

- Assuming the onus to change is, or should be, on a single person (particularly the “different” person, or a character already identified as neurodivergent).
- Suggesting the situation is the different person’s “fault”, or that they are deliberately causing a problem, or it is their responsibility to fix it.
- Suggestions that particular needs could be overlooked or postponed—though those explanations may come from a lack of understanding or a genuine attempt to solve the current problem.

These attitudes and expectations may disproportionately impact neurodivergent pupils at school, and may affect how they see themselves and their experiences.

This discussion is a good time to encourage reflection on all these attitudes, where they implicitly or explicitly appear. Why is a person expressing that idea? Why don’t they say that others also have a part to play in constructively resolving a situation?

We would encourage you to question these types of explanations, where you hear them, and to help pupils identify alternative ways of thinking about (or resolving) the situations.

Part 4: Summative discussion and connecting back to neurodiversity

Step back from the individual scenarios to a whole-class discussion of situations where differences between people may cause conflict.

Start with general questions like:

- Was there anything that surprised you about the scenarios or about the solutions?
- Do you think it is important or not important for everyone to behave the same way?
- Are there any good things about people being different from one another?

If the class has not already introduced the topic, focus in on ideas of **problem-solving and solutions** in this context. You might ask questions like:

- What does a “good solution” feel like when people need or want different things?
- Do we think there will always be a solution to situations like the ones in the scenarios?

After some discussion, pupils should be ready to acknowledge how messy all of this is! Solutions depend on the people involved, and sadly there *won't* always be a solution that works equally well for everyone.

A crucial message in this unit is that *situations* can pose problems for people, but *people* are not problems to be solved. Help your pupils think about their language as they talk about problems and solutions.

To wrap up the activity, challenge your class to connect their new insights back to their **neurodiversity vocabulary**. For example, you might ask:

“Do you think the situations we have been discussing have something to do with neurodiversity and neurodivergence? What could it be?”

There are multiple connections, depending on which scenarios were discussed.

Ideally, your class may identify that **differences in information processing** are at the bottom of many scenario situations, such as challenges with specific skills like reading, balancing, or maths—and also related to things like difficulty sitting still during story time, or wanting the same lunch every day. They also might refer to communication differences (Unit 3).

4.3 Explaining needs and wants



Whole class (teacher-led)

Time estimate: 15 minutes



Please deliver this activity as written.

Key points addressed

12. **Needs and wants aren't the same.** Just because I really want something doesn't make it a need.
13. **What I need may be different than what other people need, and that is OK.** Everyone has things they need to thrive at school and in their life.
14. **Sometimes, people may need opposite things (conflicting needs). That doesn't mean that either person is wrong.** We may need to compromise about what happens in those situations, to try to help everyone the best we can.

Resource link

"Explaining needs and wants" [6 minutes]

Video link: https://media.ed.ac.uk/media/1_axpqf8pu

This video is not downloadable, and must be viewed online. The video script appears in the downloadable materials for Unit 4.

Video content summary

- The video contrasts the differences between things we need, and things we want—and that these will be different across people.
- It gives examples of concrete, physical needs like a hearing aid or glasses, as well as "invisible" needs, like receiving information in a different format to help us understand it.
- Introduces vocabulary of *needs*, *wants*, *conflicting needs*.

Depending on your class, you may wish to **challenge pupils to try answering the video's main question**, before they see the video and hear the "official" answer. Do they think there is a difference between needing or wanting something? How would they explain it?

After the video, we recommend recapping the vocabulary again. What's the difference between a want and a need? What are conflicting needs?

Teaching points to think about

Recognising conflicting needs situations

Based on our evaluation study, it seems like participating children could find it tricky to identify conflicting needs situations when these weren't explicitly described in terms of "Person A needs X and Person B needs Y."

In post-video discussion or as the school year goes on, help your class feel confident about this term by modelling how to use it, especially in relation to situations or examples that haven't used the word "needs". Pupils may benefit from more help to connect this concept to daily life situations where it actually happening!

Connections to human rights and citizenship curricula

In talking about **needs** in the context of neurodiversity, they are closely related to the concept of **rights**. In a school context many needs may come directly back to basic rights.

If it fits with curricula you have already covered, this is also a good point to connect needs to the idea of **rights and responsibilities** (such as the [UN convention on the rights of the child](#), the Rights Respecting Schools framework, other human rights topics, or lessons on citizenship and civic duty. Children in the LEANS target age range (8-11 years) may have a strong sense of what they are entitled to (their own rights, even if they are not yet using that vocabulary), but not necessarily an awareness of their corresponding duties towards others (responsibilities).

4.4 “I want, I need”

Whole class (teacher-led)

Time estimate: 25 minutes



Please deliver this activity as written.

Key points addressed

12. **Needs and wants aren't the same.** Just because I really want something doesn't make it a need.
13. **What I need may be different than what other people need, and that is OK.** Everyone has things they need to thrive at school and in their life.

Materials

- LEANS story booklet
- Unit 4 PowerPoint. The **4.4** story slides show illustrations of key story scenes supported by captions

Pre-delivery preparation

Time estimate: 10 minutes

Download the story materials. Review the story, and make any amendments if needed for ethics and safety reasons.

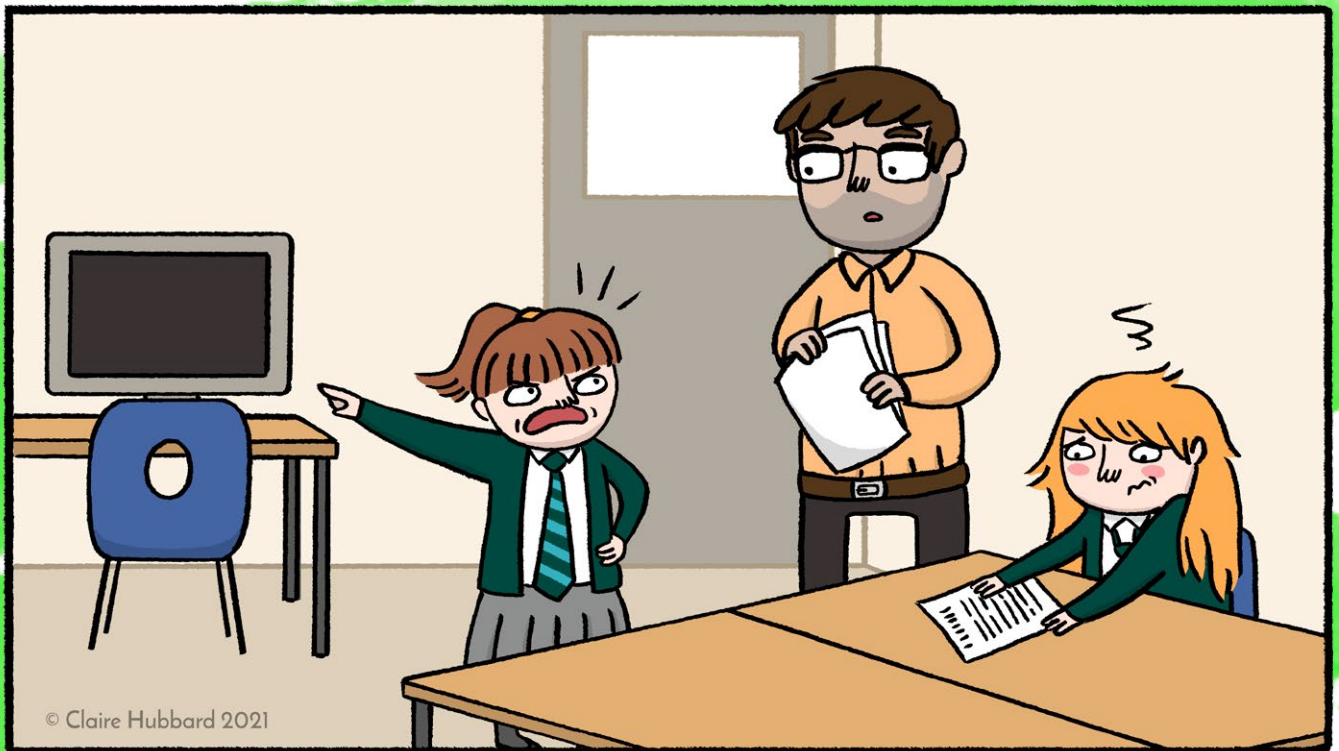
Instructions

Display the story PowerPoint as you read the story to the class, advancing to the next illustration where marked in the text. This story has short discussion questions, to help pupils practise applying the needs-wants vocabulary introduced in resource item **4.3**.



Unit 5

Is that fair?



What does fairness have to do with neurodiversity?

When developing LEANS, **fairness** and **unfairness** came up repeatedly as we considered neurodivergent pupils' school experiences. The more we discussed, the more we realised that these concepts are deeply involved in how children interact and the types of beliefs they have about one another—and about their *own* experiences, strengths, and challenges.

Neurodivergent children (especially those with officially documented support needs) may appear to *do* or *get* things that classmates do not—or appear like they aren't held to the same rules. This can be a source of friction, especially where needs aren't visible, or may be poorly understood by peers.

The LEANS materials focus on **equity-based understandings of fairness**. More specifically, they model the idea that we don't have to think about classroom supports as a zero-sum situation, advantaging one person at the expense of others. Doing things differently may be making things *more* fair, not less. Shifting attitudes to treat fairness in a less black-and-white way can benefit all pupils—but especially neurodivergent pupils.

A major Unit 5 goal, beyond the Key Points, is encouraging children to *pause and think* before making assumptions or accusations about fairness or unfairness. There may be real, important reasons for what is happening, even if you don't know what they are.

Unit 5 summary for teachers

Delivery time estimate for Unit 5: 2 hr 20 min to 3 hrs (excluding optional content).

What is this unit about?

This unit grapples with two possible concepts of fairness: an equality or “sameness” concept of fairness, and an equity or needs-based concept. It encourages pupils to question sameness-based understandings of fairness, and why these may not work for everyone. It explains how the principle of **equity** is already at work in many familiar school situations—like a teacher spending more time with a pupil who has more questions.

Mainly through story explanations, it also tries to address objections that pupils may have for example, that getting support automatically grants an “unfair” advantage over others, or that some tools are “cheating” or mean pupils aren’t doing the work themselves.

The unit also introduces a **balance scale metaphor** for thinking about fairness. Someone may experience a challenge that others don’t have in that situation. It’s “a weight on their scale”—so they may also use a support that others don’t use, as a tool to meet that challenge and help “balance their scale”.

Unit 5: Is that fair? is structured around the following Key Points [KP]:

15. **Fairness in school isn’t always about being treated the same or getting the same things.**
16. **Sometimes, it can be fair for people to get or to do different things than their classmates, because they don’t have the same needs.** Being treated fairly helps us be able to do our best at school.
17. **Due to their learning and thinking, some neurodivergent students may do things differently in the classroom.** What helps one person may not help another—neurodivergent people are very different from each other too.

The resource items in this unit are:

5.1 Is that fair? [Optional warm-up activity, preparation to encounter KP15-17]

- Short activity to get pupils thinking about their own ideas of fairness and unfairness, by judging common situations such as turn-taking.

5.2 “The fairest classroom ever” + Defining fairness [Integrated story and activity, KP15]

- In the class next door to Mr. Oliver’s, the co-teachers are determined to have “The fairest classroom ever” by treating every person exactly the same. They take this to logical but ridiculous extremes, causing everyone to reconsider whether “the same” is always fair.
- Via the story and interspersed activity sections, the fictional classes and your class should conclude that it’s often more helpful to think of fairness in terms of meeting people’s needs.

5.3 Explaining fairness [Video resource, KP15-17]

- A 12.5-minute video that starts with everyday situations where we might talk about fairness or unfairness, then challenges the idea that things can only be fair when they are “the same”.
- The video also discusses how we might react when we see differences and believe these are unfair. It encourages pupils to pause and think before calling “unfair!” or questioning someone about apparent differences. Sometimes, we need to accept that we don’t know exactly what’s going on—but that teachers or other adults do know and are helping.

5.4 “Text and balances” [Story, KP15-17]

- Anna-Jade causes a scene about Morag being able to “unfairly” type class assignments. In the resulting discussion, Mr. Oliver’s class goes deeper into the idea of how fairness applies to differences in classroom activities and supports.
- He introduces the metaphor of a balance scale to help pupils think about how tools and supports can make things more fair, not less.

5.5 Let’s talk it over [Activity, KP13 revisited from Unit 4, KP16]

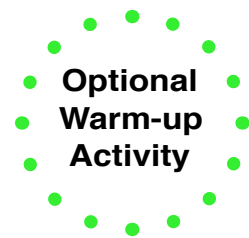
- Pupils are asked to apply their new fairness knowledge by developing arguments to convince a LEANS character that it would be fair and “not cheating” to accept extra help at school for the first time (or to continue accepting help).
- This could be run as a debate-style activity, or even with an arts component.

Unit 5 classroom poster (available for download)**What if my class already has an advanced understanding of fairness?**

This unit assumes that children will mostly have a sameness-based understanding of fairness, and works to challenge and replace that definition. However, individuals in your class, or your whole class, might already have a more equity-based model of fairness, that emphasises people getting what they *need*, and not just the *same*.

In this case, you can still deliver the Unit as laid out, but can help them take their understanding even further, by considering:

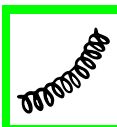
- The fact that a sameness-based understanding of fairness is very common, even among grown-ups!
- Types of situations where we might apply different understandings of fairness. Is *everything* about needs?
- How could we explain equity-based fairness to others?



5.1 Is that fair?

Multiple options for organisation (individuals, groups, class)

Time estimate: 10+ minutes. This will depend on your activity plan



This activity is flexible and can be adapted.

Key Points addressed

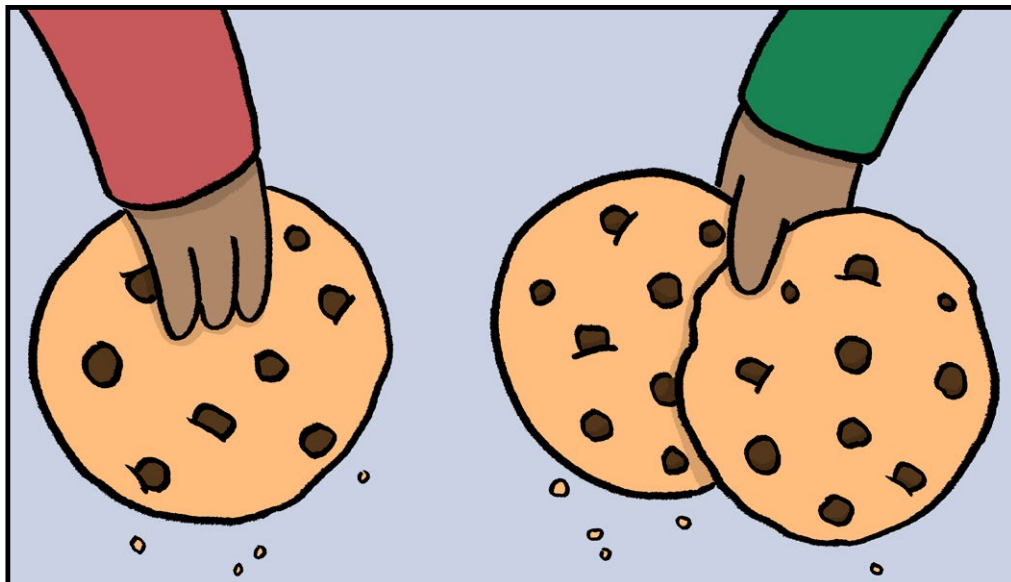
None (is preparation for another activity).

Summary

In this warm-up, pupils decide if situations are fair or unfair, based on how they personally understand that term.

This activity could be as simple as posing a series of questions and asking children to note down "fair or unfair", or asking people to vote in some way. Alternately, you could have a more structured format.

While this activity is optional we would encourage you to do it if you can, even as a 10-minute preface to 5.2. You may find it easier to support discussion later in Unit 5 if you have a sense of your class's current thinking on fairness.



Materials

- List of situation suggestions (downloadable resource)
- *Optional: non-verbal methods for individuals or the class to record their opinions, vote on questions, etc.*

Pre-activity preparation

Time estimate: 5 minutes if using provided examples

- Choose the examples you wish to use, or write your own. They are completely flexible, though see *Teaching points to think about*, below. We suggest 5-7 items, though you could do more.
- If needed, prepare materials for the class to record their opinions or cast votes (e.g. placing stickers on posters, voting with tokens).

In your planning, you may wish to consider:

1. How much **time** you think your class needs to spend on this warm up, to help prepare them for the Unit 5 stories and discussions on fairness. How many examples might they need to consider?
2. Do individuals or the class need to **record** their opinions somewhere, or is thinking about the examples enough? Should recording be public, or private?

Teaching points to think about

Run this activity like “Would you rather?” (1.1)

If your class enjoyed how you did activity **1.1**, you could borrow the same format here. Even if you stayed seated in 1.1, you could also mix it up and **vote by moving!** Pupils go to different parts of the room to show their views, or arrange themselves along a line to show the strength of their opinion.

Giving a definition of fairness doesn’t support the activity/unit goals

As noted in the summary, the purpose of the activity is for pupils to think about their sense of fairness—not whether examples match up to a given definition. If pupils ask what you mean by “fair”, encourage them to follow their own opinions. You want to know what they think!

The next activity **5.2** explicitly asks pupils to try constructing definitions of fairness.

Creating example situations for fairness judgements

This activity should not make anyone feel left out based on their personal and family circumstances. In the list of suggested situations (downloadable resource), we focused on school-based situations and tried to keep them less personal—like pets, snacks, and school rules. This is to try to make the situations relevant to as many children as possible.

We have included fewer situations that take place at home, as it was challenging to author examples that did not make too many assumptions about children's living situations, or the types of resources they might have.

If you wish to write your own examples, we encourage you to also focus on school-based situations.

5.2 “The fairest classroom ever” + Defining fairness

Story
+
Activity

Whole class, teacher-facilitated
(could also use pair, group, or individual
working for activity segments)

Time estimate: 45-60 minutes. Small group work would probably be at the upper end of that estimate.



Please deliver this activity as written.

Key points addressed

15. **Fairness in school isn't always about being treated the same or getting the same things.**
16. **Sometimes, it can be fair for people to *get* or to *do* different things than their classmates, because they don't have the same needs.** Being treated fairly helps us be able to do our best at school.

Summary

This activity alternates story content with an activity about defining fairness—and updating these definitions as we get new information. In the story, we hear about surprising happenings in the class next door, where the two co-teachers are keen to be “the fairest classroom ever” with unintended and often funny consequences.

The integrated activity challenges pupils to reconstruct the definitions of fairness that teachers are following in “the fairest classroom ever”, and how these evolve. The story and activity alternate so that pupils can also revise their definitions. By the end, we have worked from an understanding of fairness as sameness, toward a definition of “fairness” that is focused on meeting people’s needs.

Materials

- LEANS story booklet. The text for this story includes the activity prompts and teacher notes about delivering these. Prompts for the definitions activity.
- Unit 5 PowerPoint. The **5.2** story slides intersperse the discussion activity prompts between the illustrations of major story scenes.
- Materials for pupils to record and update their fairness definitions.
 - We suggest large paper and markers, so that people can cross out, add things, etc.
 - Small whiteboards could also work, or typing the definitions on a laptop/tablet.

Pre-delivery preparation

Teacher preparation:

Time estimate: 15 minutes

- Review the story, and make any amendments if needed for ethics and safety reasons.
- Decide your definitions activity format (whole class, group/pair, or individual working).

Class preparation: If you are spacing LEANS out over a whole school year, your class may wish to **review needs and wants** or re-watch video **4.3** before beginning.

Instructions

Part 1: Teacher led introduction

Explain that this LEANS story will be different: we will stop three times to work on an activity about **definitions of fairness**. Pupils should be prepared to discuss what the characters are doing and thinking re: fairness at school.

If useful, pose an overall question to guide pupils' listening. For example,

"What do you think fairness/unfairness means to these characters?" or

"What rules are people following to make things fair?"

The activity format is flexible:

- You could work on the definitions as a **whole class**, writing on the board or typing into a blank PowerPoint slide.
- Children could work on definitions by **tables/groups/pairs**.
- Work could be **individual**.

Part 2: Story and activity

Display the story PowerPoint as you read the story to the class, advancing to the next illustration or activity point where marked in the text.

At each **activity point**, the class will pause to create (or later, revise) a definitions of fairness, based on the story events. *The prompts and further teacher notes appear in the LEANS story booklet.*

If any pupils are typing their definitions (or if you are typing where the whole class can see), don't delete the old definitions. Revise a copy, so definitions can be reviewed side-by-side as you go on.

My class already has an equity-based understanding of fairness

We'd encourage you to deliver the activity as outlined. It first asks pupils to report what others believe and do about fairness, and to think about why that is. They will then have a chance to revise this definition toward a more equity-based one, and can show what they know. Prior knowledge will speed up the activity!

Part 3: Wrap up

Ask for initial thoughts and reactions to discussing fairness. Did anyone hear something that surprised them today, or did they change their mind about anything?

Some children may maintain that sameness is the best policy. That's OK—you can move on without needing to convince people now! The rest of the unit continues to work with these ideas.

If your class seems really divided, it's worth acknowledging that **lots of people, including adults, don't agree with each other about fairness**. We may need to negotiate about what will happen in different situations, to find acceptable options.

5.3 Explaining fairness

Video

Whole class (teacher-led)

Time estimate: 15 minutes

Key Points addressed

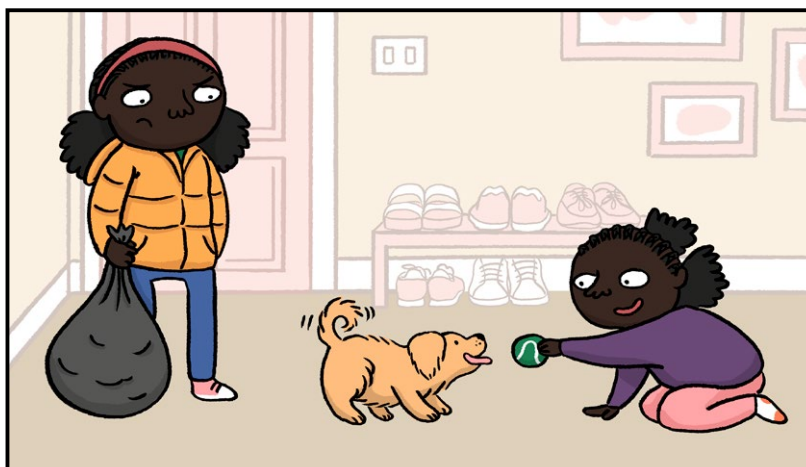
15. **Fairness in school isn't always about being treated the same or getting the same things.**
16. **Sometimes, it can be fair for people to get or to *do* different things than their classmates, because they don't have the same needs.** Being treated fairly helps us be able to do our best at school.
17. **Due to their learning and thinking, some neurodivergent students may do things differently in the classroom.** What helps one person may not help another—neurodivergent people are very different from each other too.

Resource link

"Explaining fairness" [12.5 minutes]

Video link: https://media.ed.ac.uk/media/1_xno6jmfc

This video is not downloadable, and must be viewed online. The video script appears in the downloadable materials for Unit 5.



Video content summary

- The video starts with everyday situations where we might talk about fairness or unfairness (like sharing snacks or chores), and then challenges the idea that things can only be fair when they are “the same”.
- It uses silly counterexamples, like giving everyone in the class eyeglasses, to illustrate why sameness may not always help people or make things fairer.
- It then talks through the example of a pupils struggling with handwriting and using a computer for their assignments—when no one else is allowed to. Why can this be fair?
- The video also discusses how we might *react* when we see differences and believe these are unfair. It encourages pupils to pause and think before making judgements.

You probably do not need any post-video discussion, as many points are revisited and expanded in the next story.

5.4 “Text and balances”

Story

Whole class, teacher-facilitated

Time estimate: 35-45 minutes



Please deliver this activity as written.

Key points addressed

15. **Fairness in school isn’t always about being treated the same or getting the same things.**
16. **Sometimes, it can be fair for people to *get* or to *do* different things than their classmates, because they don’t have the same needs.** Being treated fairly helps us be able to do our best at school.
17. **Due to their learning and thinking, some neurodivergent students may do things differently in the classroom.** What helps one person may not help another—neurodivergent people are very different from each other too.

Summary

In this story, Mr. Oliver’s class now has started thinking about fairness in terms of meeting needs—but not everyone is satisfied. Mr. Oliver’s class goes deeper into the idea of how fairness applies to classroom activities and supports. He introduces the metaphor of a **balance scale** to help pupils think about how people who have challenges that others do not, may need tools that others do not. It’s about “balancing their scales.”

Pre-delivery preparation

Time estimate: 10-15 minutes

Review the story, and make any amendments if needed for ethics and safety reasons. Also review the additional teacher information on the **balance scale metaphor** introduced in this story (see content box at the end of the entry for this item).

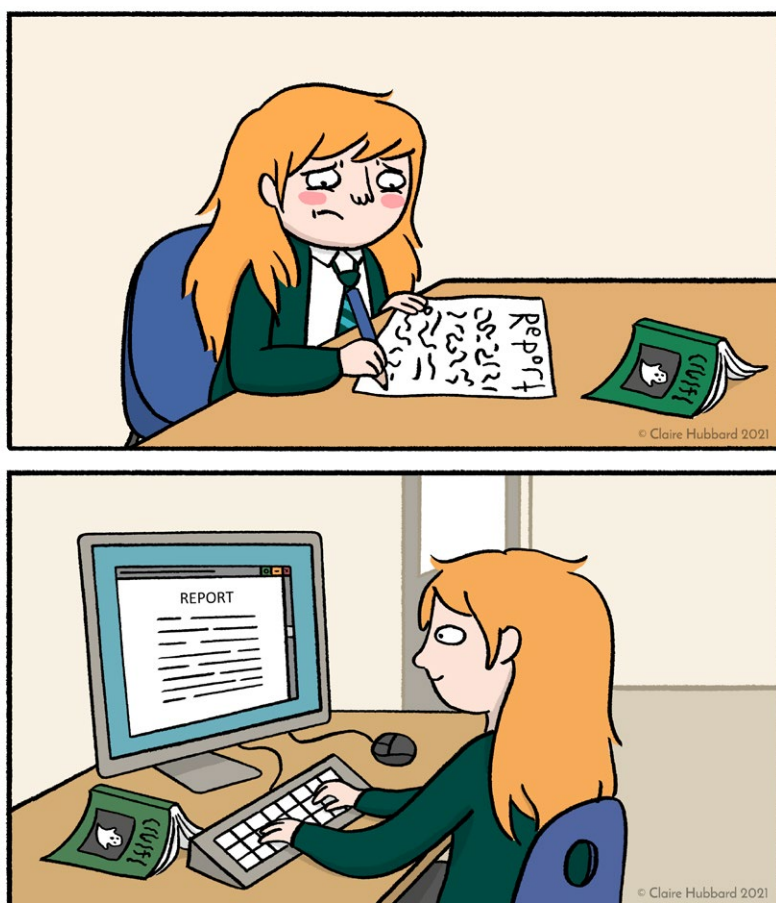
Instructions

Display the story PowerPoint as you read the story to the class, advancing to the next illustration where marked in the text.

This is a long story. The text marks a useful transition point where you could pause, if you wish to split the content over multiple sessions.

This story has additional **discussion questions** at several points, but they do not form a continuous activity like the definitions activity in resource **5.2**.

By the end of the story, make sure your class understands the point of the **balance scale metaphor**, as they will need to use this idea in the next activity **5.5** (though not in great detail!).



The balance scale metaphor

In this story, Mr. Oliver introduces a new metaphor for fairness, the **balance scale**. He is trying to address concerns that classroom changes or additional supports give some pupils an advantage over others (i.e. are actively disadvantaging classmates). The point of the balance scale is to suggest that supports may help “even things up” rather than putting some people ahead of others. People getting or doing apparently “extra” things may be making school *more* fair, not less.

In a given situation, we have both **challenges** (needs) and **tools** to address them (skills, information, strategies, supports). Some of the challenges and tools will be shared across the class—but some people will face challenges their peers do not. To “balance out” these challenges, people need more tools too. In the story, the example is a dyspraxic character’s handwriting challenges being “balanced out” by typing the work.



Mr. Oliver reminds the class that the example is about *one person in one situation*. People’s scales will differ from one another, and each person would have a different scales in a different situations (for example, sports, maths, or art rather than a book report). Different situations make different demands on us—and our available tools and coping capacity can vary too.

5.5 Let's talk it over

Combination of whole class and small group work

Time estimate: 45-60 minutes, depends on your activity plan.

Activity



This activity is flexible and can be adapted.

Key Points addressed

13. **[Revisited from Unit 4] What I need may be different than what other people need, and that is OK.** Everyone has things they need to thrive at school and in their life.
16. **Sometimes, it can be fair for people to get or to do different things than their classmates, because they don't have the same needs.** Being treated fairly helps us be able to do our best at school.

Summary

LEANS character Simon has always struggled with reading—but has been opposed to accepting help. Now, he's uncertain about the right thing to do. In small groups, pupils are challenged to use LEANS ideas (especially the fairness concepts from this unit and needs-wants from Unit 4) to convince Simon that it can be fair and “not cheating” for him to accept help from his teacher. Explaining the concepts as though to someone else draws on the principle of **learning-by-teaching**, and can also show up where class understanding is weak and you may need extra review.

Materials

- *Simon's dilemma* activity scenario (1 page)
- *Simon's dilemma* Printable pupil instructions (1 page)
- *Simon's dilemma* Printable teacher guide (2 pages)

In case reading or help about reading are particularly sensitive in your class, we've included a back-up scenario and discussion notes focused on a different LEANS character accepting maths help. *Simon is the recommended scenario because the Unit 7 stories pick up this issue, and show Simon asking Mr. Oliver for help.*

- Back-up scenario, instructions, and teacher guide for *Neelam's dilemma* activity scenario.

Pupils will need note-taking materials.

Pre-activity preparation

Time estimate: 15-20 minutes if using the proposed small group format. Choosing a different format (see *More Options*) will add preparation time.

1. Read through the scenario and instructions. Decide if you would like to adapt the activity format (see *More Options* section).
2. Print pupil handouts (at least one activity scenario and instruction sheet per group)
3. If desired, pre-assign groups.

Instructions

Please note that all the handbook instructions refer to the Simon scenario. Follow the same instructions if you need to use the back-up scenario about maths help (Neelam's dilemma).

Part 1: Whole class introduction

Introduce the activity idea. You might say something like:

"Simon has trouble with his reading, but always said no to help from teachers. He didn't think it was the right thing to do. After Mr. Oliver's class discussed fairness, he feels confused and wishes he could talk to someone about it.

*In this activity, you will pretend that you're talking to Simon. You need to **use what you have learned about fairness** to help answer Simon's questions, and try to convince him that it would be fair to accept help."*

Explain what you would like pupils to do during the activity, and your expectations for how they will share their Question 2 answers (convincing Simon) back to the class.

Optional: Briefly review fairness ideas from earlier in the unit, or take class questions on fairness before beginning the activity proper.

Emphasise that this activity is about using information to *convince someone* who feels uncertain of what's true or what to do—it's not about "winning" or making them admit they are wrong. *This point is even more important if you're running a debate-style activity, or asking pupils to act out a conversation as the method of sharing their answer.*

Part 2: Small group work

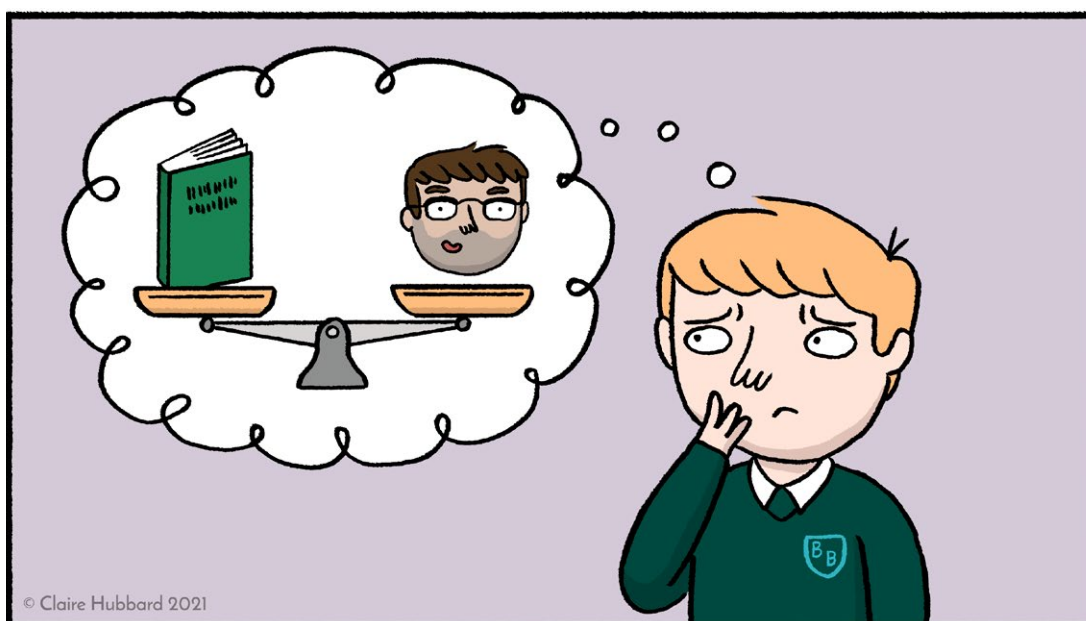
Divide your class into small groups of 3 or 4 pupils. Give each group printed instructions and copy of the scenario.

The group (or individuals) read the **Simon's dilemma scenario**. They will need look at the text for clues.

Pupils will consider the following big questions and record their answers:

1. What are Simon's questions and worries, and what could your group say?
2. How could your group convince Simon that it's OK to accept help?

Give pupils time to work. They will probably need at least 15 minutes to work through both questions, after they have read the scenario.



Part 3: Groups share their ideas about how to convince Simon

Optional: Share ideas from question 1, or talk about any questions or worries that pupils identified, but didn't know how to address.

Invite small groups to **explain what they would say to convince Simon** that it *is* fair to accept help.

We suggest hearing from 3-4 groups, and asking for volunteer groups that may have relied on *different* reasoning. If the first group talks about the balance scale, has another group chosen to say something different to Simon? *See printable teacher guide for some notes on possible lines of reasoning.*

If no groups mention the balance scale metaphor... Please suggest this to your class, and talk through how it could be an alternate explanation of why receiving help/supports is fair.

If a group takes the position that it is not fair for Simon to ask for help...

This is an opportunity for other groups to use their knowledge, and perhaps the explanations they just prepared. Invite classmates to respond to the claims that it isn't fair. What do they have to say? If you think that the group's position is due to misunderstanding or unanswered questions, this could be a good point to pause for further review.

More options

Debate-style discussion

Instead of asking groups to consider both perspectives (Simon *and* a classmate), different groups could prepare each of those positions and then have a conversation. Children who had prepared Simon's concerns and questions would then speak to those taking a "classmate" role. The whole class could be paired off for this part, or re-assemble in new small groups, with two pupils conversing based on the prepared argument, and the others taking supporting group roles.

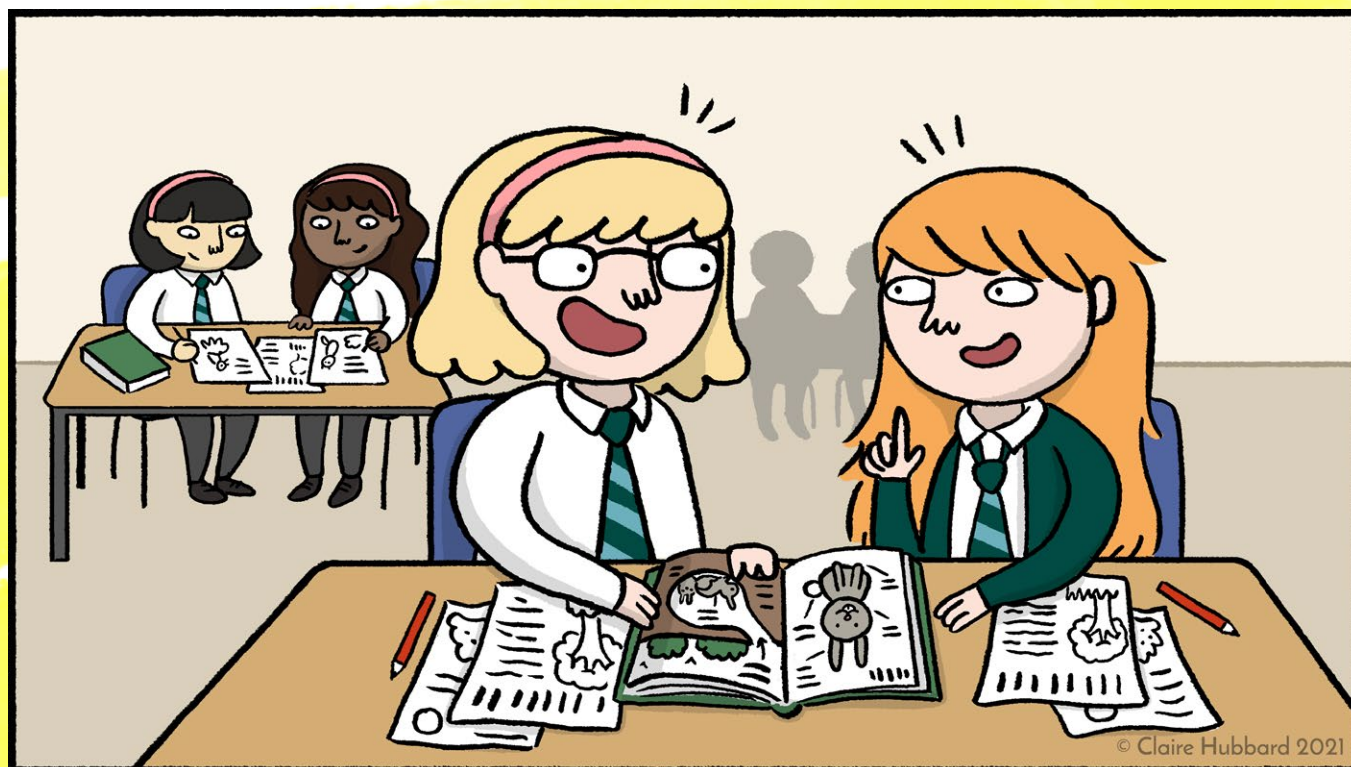
Children who might feel uncomfortable speaking out as debaters could potentially participate as observers, note-takers, or "judges". What arguments did the characters use? Who do they think made the best case for their position? Was there *missing* information that could have been used? The goal is not to "win" but to use the information.

Visual response to the prompt

Some (or all) pupils could create a more visual response to the "convince Simon" prompt. For example, they might make a mind map of their ideas, draw a comic of Simon having this conversation with a classmate, make a poster summarising their idea, or represent their ideas in some other way.

Unit 6

Different ways to make a friendship



Unit 6 summary for teachers

Delivery time estimate for Unit 6: 1.5 hrs to 1 hr 50 min (excluding optional content)

What is this unit about?

This unit focuses on friendships and peer relationships between classmates. Using the metaphor of a recipe, pupils consider the qualities, interests, and other aspects that make up their personal concept of friendship. Discussion explores how much variability there can be in how friendship looks for different people, what we do (or don't do) together, and how accepting we are of changes or "imperfections" in the relationship.

The stories in this unit aims to illustrate the extremely different social experiences that pupils might have including someone who has never before felt like they had a friend, and someone who shows their friendship through listening to others. Both stories emphasise that relationships are dynamic, and involve choices and changes. They also emphasise the importance of perspective-taking, and considering other people's needs and wants.

Unit 6: Friendship is structured around the following Key Points [KP]:

18. **There are many ways to be a good friend or classmate.** We can also be different in the types of friendships we want to have. The same things may not be equally important to every person.
19. **No friendship is perfect all the time.** You can still be friends with someone even if you have disagreements, don't always want to do the same things, spend time apart, or are different in other ways.
20. **Trying to think about what another person needs or wants, not only what I want, is an important part of being a friend or classmate.** I need to remember that other people may need or want different things than I do.

The resource items in this unit are:

6.1 "Second chances" [Story, KP 18]

- Morag and Kristina give each other another chance when assigned as partners for a class project. They discover many shared interests, and are now on the way to becoming friends.

6.2 What is a recipe? [Optional warm-up activity for 6.3]

- If your whole class is not already familiar with recipes, a brief warm-up primes them to think about the parts of a recipe (ingredients, measurements, instructions) and relevant vocabulary.

6.3 Friendship recipes [Activity, KP18-19]

- Students create their own recipe for a type of friendship they would like to have, and will see that peers value different qualities, or may prioritise the same ones differently.
- Recipes form a jumping-off point to discuss 'modifying' the recipe in different ways, as a way to reflect on how real friendships and real people can be a bit messy—we may not always have all those ideal ingredients, but thinking about the most important ones can remind us what our friendships are really about.

6.4 "New friends, still friends?" [Story, KP 18-20]

- Performer and "funny guy" Ibrahim worries that lifelong best friend Jack no longer likes him, as Ibrahim tries to get more serious about school. Jack is confused because their relationship seems to be changing.
- Nic gives them each a listening ear and helps them to realise that the most important "ingredients" of friendship are still there.

Unit 6 classroom poster *(available for download)*

Teaching points to think about: including everyone in this unit

Throughout discussing social and friendship topics, our educator design team was very concerned to:

1. Include children who may feel like they do not have friends (or are not themselves a friend), or whose friends are outwith school. Those circumstances may all be more likely to apply to neurodivergent or other marginalised pupils.
2. Avoid privileging neurotypical ideas of what friendships should "look like".

Please keep these ideas in mind as you prepare and deliver this unit, and as you talk about friendship in the classroom.

6.1 “Second chances”

Story

Whole class, teacher-facilitated

Time estimate: 20 minutes



Please deliver this activity as written.

Key points addressed

18. **There are many ways to be a good friend or classmate.**
We can also be different in the types of friendships we want to have. The same things may not be equally important to every person.

Materials

- LEANS story booklet
- Unit 6 PowerPoint. The **6.1** story slides show illustrations of key story scenes supported by captions

Pre-delivery preparation

Time estimate: 10 minutes

Review the story, and make any amendments if needed for ethics and safety reasons.

This story has an **author’s note** for teachers, and we’d encourage you to read it before delivering the story. It appears at the end of the story text and gives additional information that may help you in discussing it with your class, especially drawing attention to the differences between the two characters’ past experiences.

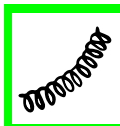
Instructions

Display the story PowerPoint as you read the story to the class, advancing to the next illustration where marked in the text.

6.2 What is a recipe?

Multiple options (individuals, groups, class)

Time estimate: 10-15 minutes+, but this will depend on your activity plan.



This activity is flexible and can be adapted.

Key Points addressed

None (is preparation for another activity).

Summary

If members of your class may not be familiar with recipes, introduce them to the parts of a recipe and common vocabulary. For example, what is an ingredients list and what does this look like? We suggest doing the warm-up **immediately preceding** activity **6.3**, as part of the same lesson.

*If you know your class is highly familiar with recipes, you can skip the warm-up. You may also wish to skip it if you plan to do a more visual, arts-based approach to the recipe-making in activity **6.3**.*

Class activity ideas

- **Look at several example recipes** (or challenge pupils to find a recipe example). Use these to identify the “parts” of a recipe: name/title, list of ingredients, measurements, instruction steps. What is the purpose of each part?
- Looking at existing recipes, **create a recipe “word bank”** for measurement and action terms that pupils can refer to in their own recipes. Record somewhere it can be referenced later.
- **Do a cooking activity at school** if facilities permit, or another activity that involves a recipe but may not need a full kitchen (e.g. mix ingredients to make “slime”). *This option will require a bit more time!*

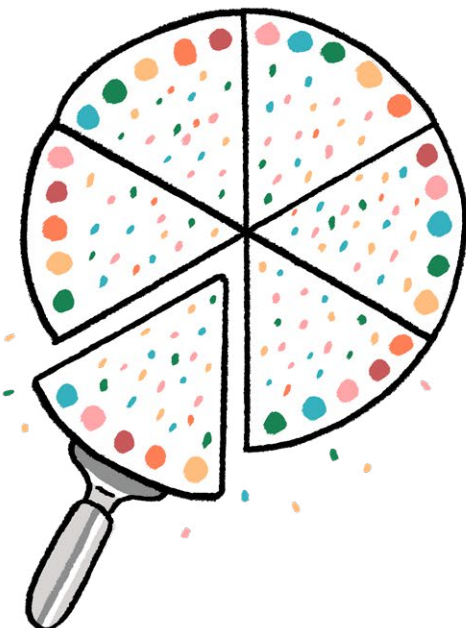
Varying experiences with cooking and food, food insecurity

Cooking and recipes may or may not be a **shared point of reference** for everyone at your school. It's an uncomfortable truth that increasing numbers of children and families experience **food insecurity**, and may lack ingredients, facilities, or fuel to cook at home. If you are at all unsure, we'd encourage you to act as though that does apply in your class.

If possible, avoid...

- Talking about cooking from scratch as something "everyone" does at home
- Assumptions that pupils have choices about what is being cooked/eaten at home
- Asking pupils to bring in a "favourite" recipe, and similar.

Another factor to remember here is **cultural diversity** in terms of ingredients and techniques—or whether formally written recipes are much used! If generating a word bank, seek to reflect the cultural diversity in your class.

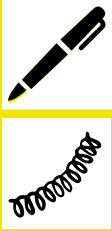


6.3 Friendship recipes

Activity

Mixture of individual and whole class, teacher-facilitated

Time estimate: 45-60 minutes, though choosing an arts-based option may require more time



This activity has mixed flexibility. Please look for 'deliver as written' or 'flexible' labels on individual sections.

Key Points addressed

18. **There are many ways to be a good friend or classmate.**
We can also be different in the types of friendships we want to have. The same things may not be equally important to every person.
19. **No friendship is perfect all the time.** You can still be friends with someone even if you have disagreements, don't always want to do the same things, spend time apart, or are different in other ways.

Summary

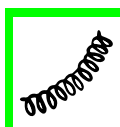
In this activity, pupils are asked to create a recipe that represents "a friendship you would like to have." What are the ingredients making up their friendship, and which ones are most important? Class discussion uses the recipe metaphor to facilitate pupils' reflections on different types of friendships we might want, and on issues of flexibility and tolerance. For example, "*what if [your biggest ingredient] was missing—is that still a friendship you would want?*" The activity closes by explicitly connecting hypothetical recipe changes to our real interactions with friends and classmates.

Materials

- Example of a recipe, *if you have not completed warm-up 6.2.*
- Whiteboard or large paper to record pupil discussion
- Any examples or memory aides your class created in warm-up **6.2** (e.g. 'banks' of measurement or cooking words)
- An example friendship recipe about yourself (see instructions, Part 1). You will need to create this, based on the template or medium you want your own class to use
- Materials for pupils to create their own recipes (*This will depend on your activity plan.*)

Pre-activity preparation

Time estimate: 15-20 minutes, depending on your activity plan



This activity is flexible and can be adapted.

You will need to decide **what kind of recipe** you want your pupils to create, and **how detailed** you expect them to be. Recipes *don't* need to be hugely detailed in order to facilitate a useful discussion. The most essential thing is that pupils are responding to the specific prompt given in Part 1.

Pupils could write their recipes, or this could be an arts-based activity. Here are some suggestions:

- Cookbook-style written recipe
- Pupils draw their ingredients and/or procedure
- Collage from digital images or paper magazines
- Mind map structure, blending writing and visuals (bubble size =importance)

For the discussion, pupils need to have considered which ingredients are **most important** to them, and made these the biggest (per measurements, or visually). Thus, the activity will work best with a format where pupils need to *choose multiple ingredients with quantities*, rather than creating a more holistic artwork or written response about friendship.

Other steps:

- Collect any other materials needed for pupils to create their recipes.
- Pre-prepare an example friendship recipe, drawing on your own experience and following the expected format and detail for pupils. *Guidance is given about this under Part 1 instructions, below.*

Teaching points to think about

“Not everyone has a friend or feels they are a friend”

This title is a direct quote from the LEANS educator design team. They were extremely clear about how fraught friendships and peer relationships can be in this age group, especially for neurodivergent children. We have carefully chosen the main activity prompt (“Create a recipe for a type of friendship *you would like to have*”) to be accessible and make sense to children who may not have a friend, or feel like they *are* a friend right now. It also applies to those who may not be satisfied or supported by the friendships they do have.



Not privileging neurotypical norms around friendship

The LEANS design team discussed—and ruled out—content that would try to **directly provide information/examples about the characteristics of friendship**. We thought this was likely to privilege neurotypical ideas and norms of what friendships “look like”. Ultimately, we felt this was incompatible with the message that there are many, equally valid ways to have a satisfying friendship or relationship. We want neurodivergent children not to hear negative messages about their relationships (even inadvertent messages), and want to expose neurotypical children to concepts of friendship they may be less familiar with.

For this reason, we would also ask you to consider very carefully re: providing information about “what friendship is”, or examples of what friends do, unless you’re able to provide a large and varied number of examples.

Connecting to needs and wants vocabulary from Unit 4

You could help pupils to make the connection that some of our friendship recipe ingredients may be needs, and some might be wants. What does it mean, anyway, to think about “needs” in a relationship?

Needs and wants are particularly relevant to activity instructions Parts 3-4, where pupils start to consider changes to their recipes—is it acceptable to them if some ingredients (aspects of a friendship) are changed or missing? The answer might be different if the changed thing are wants or needs.

Expect the unexpected!

Especially if you are a neurotypical teacher, remember that neurodivergent pupils in your class may create friendship recipes that look very different to what you might expect, or have ingredients that seem unusual or even slightly concerning until you know the reasoning behind them. Neurodivergent pupils may consider the prompt from a different angle than their neurotypical classmates—and that is OK! Of course, you should always follow up if you have significant concerns about any pupil based on their recipe or the way they are talking about their friendships.

Instructions

Part 1: Introduction to the task and friendship recipe example



Please deliver this activity as written.

Introduce the activity premise: everyone will create their own personal recipe with the “ingredients” of a friendship.

If your class hasn't done the warm-up in 6.2, you may wish to briefly display an example recipe here, as a reminder.

Please use the following prompt, verbatim:

“What are the ingredients in a friendship you would like to have?”

This question may need unpacking, drawing attention to the fact it says a friendship, not a friend. What you would want it to be like for you to be friends with someone?

Why we ask “What are the ingredients in a friendship you would like to have?”

1. **It asks about features of a *relationship* between people, rather than a *person*.** Given unit Key Points about many possible types of friendship and not expecting perfection, this is a more useful reflection than focusing pupils on an ideal person.
2. **This is a question that all pupils can answer in some form,** even if they currently do not believe that they have any friends (or may believe that they, themselves, are not a friend).
3. **Avoiding conflict:** Some pupils will doubtless think of a particular friend when creating their recipe. For pupils who have multiple close friends in class, officially asking about *relationship* ingredients rather than specific people could reduce potential conflict around choosing or preferring one friend over another (i.e. “How come you made your recipe about Katie, not me?!”).
4. **Space for possibilities:** Pupils can envision friendships that may be different than ones they have now, or had in the past.

Introduce the **parts of the recipe pupils are expected to produce per your activity plan, and what they should do in order to create/record these.** For a cookbook-style recipe you might ask for:

1. A name/title
2. A list of ingredients, with a measurement for each ingredient
3. Instructions about how to put them together. *If you are short on time, skip the instructions because the discussion plan focuses on the ingredients and their measurements.*

Amend this as needed to reflect your plan for Part 2 (e.g. if you are asking students to create a recipe collage, they might not need to write down anything!).

To illustrate the idea, briefly talk through **your own friendship recipe example** (see box, next page). It can be short, but make sure it's in the same format pupils need to produce themselves.

Explain your example, focusing on ingredients and measurements because those are central to the later class discussion. Why did you include more of X than Y? (To indicate it is more important).

As much as possible, **describe a relationship** or interaction between people, rather than describing a person who is your friend.

Tips for a helpful friendship recipe example

- Be **authentic** and use your own experience where you can.
- It may not help pupils if *all* your example ingredients are generic, like “make each other laugh”. Include at least one ingredient that is **specific**, to show it is *your* friendship. Examples:
 - Caring about the environment
 - Independence (It’s OK for us to spend time apart, we don’t have to talk to each other all the time)
 - Going to concerts together
 - We can talk to each other in Polish
- It could be useful to include something that might **surprise** pupils, because it may not fit expectations of friendship. The “independence” example above might be a surprise for some pupils—but resonate with others.

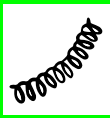
Before going on, make sure pupils grasp...

- We’re describing a type of relationship we want, not describing a person. What would we want it *to be like* to have that friend?
- Measurements are related to importance. Put the largest amount of the things that are most important to you in a friendship.
- The level of detail you expect.

In addition to any general ground rules you have for LEANS sessions, we suggest the following special rules:

- It’s not OK to say that anyone’s ideas/ingredients are wrong, or not important. Everyone’s recipe is the right one for them.
- People don’t have to tell us about their ingredients or their whole recipe if they don’t want to. It is OK not to share.
- The recipes aren’t about specific people. We will not name specific people when we make our recipes, or when we talk about the recipes.

Part 2: Recipe creation



This activity is flexible and can be adapted.

Provide the prompt for pupils again:

"What are the ingredients in a friendship you would like to have?"

Give pupils time to create their recipe, per your plan.

Do not collect the recipes yet. Pupils need to refer to them during the discussion.

Part 3: Reflecting on recipe ingredients across the class



Please deliver this activity as written.

Part 3 discussion is about illustrating **Key Point 18** by eliciting information about sameness and differences in pupils' friendship recipe ingredients, in a controlled way and led by you. *A second phase of the discussion detailed in Part 4 instructions goes on to other friendship issues.*



We ask teachers to lead this discussion and keep it closely on-topic to help reduce risks to neurodivergent pupils, or those who are different in other ways. This is a place where pupils may be happy to share their recipe, but may not foresee negative reactions from peers.

Please do not substitute small-group sharing for teacher-led discussion. Friendship recipes are personal; let sharing be a choice. For the same reason, please also refrain from calling on pupils—stick to volunteers! Similarly, we advise against **displaying** the finished recipes in the classroom.

Before beginning discussion, we'd encourage you to remind the class again about **not naming specific people** when they share about their friendship recipes, and also that **there are no wrong answers**. Many people having the same ingredient doesn't make that one "right" or better!

Start by asking about likely-popular ingredients, and ask the group to respond. For example, "How many people have [X] in their recipe?" You might ask about...

- Being interested in the same things
- Listening to each other
- Talking to each other, can tell each other things
- Kindness, being nice
- Doing things together, spending time together
- Humour: Laughing together, being funny, jokes (pupils will describe this different ways!)



Ask about 4-6 ingredients. **Record** the ingredient (or category, such as humour) and a **count** of people for each one.

Now, elicit some ingredients that are *different* from what's on the board, to help show the range of ingredients present across the class. You might ask something like...

- "Does anyone have a recipe ingredient that's the **opposite** of something on the board?"
- "Would anyone like to share an ingredient that's **completely different** than anything we have on the list? Is there anyone else who has that one?"

You could also ask pupils to respond to specific suggestions—"Did anyone have X (and is OK sharing that?)"

You do not need to get all ingredients on the board, only a selection.

Help the class to summarise and reflect on what they see on the board. Some ingredients may be widely shared—others will be unique. Even more things aren't on the board!

What does that mean? These recipes are types of friendships we would want to have, so across our class there are people who want to have friendships that would be different from one another. Connect to **Key Point 18**:

There are many ways to be a good friend or classmate. We can also be different in the types of friendships we want to have. The same things may not be equally important to every person.

Part 4: Using recipes to reflect on flexibility, change, and difference in friendships



Please deliver this activity as written.

In this second part of the discussion, you will ask pupils a series of questions about hypothetical recipe changes, and then explicitly relate these to real-life relationships. **The goal is for pupils to connect flexibility about their recipes with flexibility and tolerance of “imperfection” in real-life friendships or other interactions (Key Point 19).**

Please use your judgement about how best to **elicit responses** from your class, and how much to discuss each topic.

Before going on, ask everyone to (privately) **identify which 1-2 recipe ingredients are most important** to them, as they need this in the next step.

Thinking about changes in our own recipes

We have suggested a series of prompts, but you are welcome to adjust the wording to or let the class discussion be more organic if it is reaching these topics on its own.

*"Your recipe is about a type of friendship you would **want to have**. Would you still want this friendship if...*

*....one thing you **didn't** like was added to your recipe?"*

*...It had all the other ingredients, but **not** the most important ingredient?"*

*...It had **only** your most important ingredient, and nothing else?"*

"Do you think you could be friends with someone whose recipe was different than yours?" (Could ask follow-ons about the degree of difference that's perceived as acceptable)

*"Do you think you could write a new friendship recipe with **completely different ingredients**, that would also be a friendship you want to have?"*

This last question is getting at the idea that some of our friendships could be quite different from the others—and still work for us!

Ideally, most pupils will conclude that they are **willing to accept some variation**. Maybe then can think of instances where they already have! It might be OK to have a friendship that includes an “ingredient” they don’t like, or that has some of their ingredients but not others.

**Some pupils don’t think any changes would be OK.
What now?**

Not everyone will agree that variation in their recipe would be OK, and that a “pretty close” recipe could still be a worthwhile friendship. Neurodivergent pupils might be among the most adamant about this—think of our LEANS character Rashida, with her focus on right answers! Other pupils might say “no” because they’re struggling to predict how they would feel or what they would do.

If this happens, acknowledge **this is as another type of difference**. Some people are very flexible in the type of friendships they want to have, and others are less so—and that needs to be OK too.

Linking recipes to real relationships

In this last section, help your class make the connections between the metaphor of recipe changes you have just discussed, and possible the equivalents in real-life relationships.

Again, not everyone may think they are a friend or have a friend, so we recommend talking about *relationships* in this last discussion section.

Transition into this discussion phase: Our recipes were about **ingredients in a friendship we would like to have**. We probably wrote about a really good relationship, with all the best stuff in it. Our relationships with real people probably won’t have everything!

Revisit the types of recipe changes the class just discussed, and link them to real-life equivalents, one at a time.

Use your judgement as to whether you should directly explain the connections, or ask your class to suggest connections.

Here are some possible connections, though you could substitute your own:

Recipe includes a few ingredients we don't like	• There are things we don't share with another person. For example, a trait we don't like, a view we don't agree with, an annoying thing they do—but the other recipe ingredients (good parts of relationship) <i>are there!</i> • We probably won't like everything about a relationship all the time, and that is common and OK.
A recipe ingredient is missing (sometimes)	• This could be an instance where a person who <i>usually</i> listens, helps, shares, wants to spend time with us... does not. It doesn't mean those things will never happen again. • If this happens, it doesn't take away the other "ingredients" of the relationship that are still important to us. • If this happens, it doesn't automatically mean the other person has negative intentions, or has changed their mind about us. Like in our communication unit, this is an important place not to make assumptions. We may need to ask people what is happening.
Little overlap in people's recipe ingredients	• Maybe we don't get along with someone because the same things aren't important to us. • Not wanting/needing the same type of relationship doesn't make them (or us) bad, weird, or wrong.

Close the activity by connecting directly to **KP19, no friendship is perfect all the time**. The recipes were ideals, but real life is messier! There may be missing ingredients, or changed ingredients, or bits that aren't our favourite. When things aren't perfect in a real friendship or if we aren't sure about a new friendship, we can ask ourselves whether our most important ingredients are there.

6.4 “Are we still friends?”

Story

Whole class (teacher-led)

Time estimate: 30 minutes



Please deliver this activity as written.

Key points addressed

18. **There are many ways to be a good friend or classmate.**
We can also be different in the types of friendships we want to have. The same things may not be equally important to every person.
19. **No friendship is perfect all the time.** You can still be friends with someone even if you have disagreements, don't always want to do the same things, spend time apart, or are different in other ways.
20. **Trying to think about what another person needs or wants, not only what I want, is an important part of being a friend or classmate.** I need to remember that other people may need or want different things than I do.

Materials

- LEANS story booklet
- Unit 6 PowerPoint. The **6.4** story slides show illustrations of key story scenes supported by captions

Pre-delivery preparation

Time estimate: 10 minutes

Review the story, and make any amendments if needed for ethics and safety reasons.

This story has an **author's note** for teachers, and we'd encourage you to read it before delivering the story. It appears at the end of the story text and gives some additional perspective about how the story relates to neurodivergent experiences.

Instructions

Display the story PowerPoint as you read the story to the class, advancing to the next illustration where marked in the text.



Unit 7

Neurodiversity in our classroom



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Unit 7 summary for teachers

Delivery time estimate for Unit 7: 3 hrs to 3 hrs 45 min

This unit is the summary, consolidation, and reflection unit for LEANS. It is about putting all the pieces together (and clearing up any remaining confusion!). The goal of this unit is to create a post-LEANS legacy of more positive, inclusive choices *within* your classroom. Neurodiversity isn't going anywhere!

Concluding the LEANS stories

Stories **7.2** and **7.5** complete the “neurodiversity journey” in Mr. Oliver’s class. In **Unit 1**, they had a very public conflict, with some people giving a neurodivergent classmate a hard time. After a series of lessons mirroring LEANS (**Units 2-6**), a similarly high-stakes classroom scene now has a completely different, more positive conclusion. The stories help illustrate how individuals can make different choices about how to treat each other. *What kinds* of situations might change, and what could people choose to do and say—or choose not to do or say?

The final stories don't provide a fairy tale ending to suggest everything will be OK in Mr. Oliver’s classroom from now on—or in your classroom. The takeaway is, first, that changes are possible. Second, that inclusion, acceptance, respect, and kindness are works-in-progress and require ongoing choices. They are not “problems” that can be definitively “solved” in any classroom.

Unit 7: Neurodiversity in our classroom is structured around the following Key Points [KP]:

21. **Learning about differences between types of brains helps us understand how these differences affect people’s lives, and that those differences are OK.**
22. **As individuals and as a class, we choose how we treat each other and how we act toward people who seem different.** Those actions really matter to how people feel and learn at school. We can choose to be kind, respectful, and to listen to others.
23. **The way our actions affect other people and ourselves can be complex.** There won’t always be a “right answer” that will give everyone what they need or want, but by working together we can make things better.

The resource items in this unit are:

7.1 Reviewing Key LEANS concepts [Review activity, KP21]

7.2 “Surprises big and small” [Story, KP21-23]

- As in the very first story, there is an event where all eyes are on one person, doing something surprising—and we see various members of the class react in ways that are *also* new and surprising.
- This story models concrete and realistic changes and choices that individuals can make to treat themselves and classmates with more respect and acceptance.

7.3 Ripple effects [Activity, KP22-23]

- Using the metaphor of an event's effects “rippling outward”, pupils consider short interpersonal scenarios with the LEANS characters. What happens next, and who is affected? And *then* what happened?
- An opportunity to discuss the complexity of actions and choices—and realise that effects of a single action may be far-reaching.

7.4 Classroom commitments [Summative activity, KP22]

- *Will vary depending on your activity plan.*

7.5 “Not quite the end” [Story, KP21-23]

- The final story, ending our journey with Mr. Oliver’s class. Several pupils reflect on the momentous events of the prior story, and think ahead to what the future may bring.
- Mr. Oliver and Mrs. Adeyemi also reflect on what their class has accomplished, and stress the importance of their class continuing to make accepting and supportive choices.

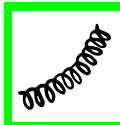
Unit 7 classroom poster (*available for download*)

7.1 Reviewing Key LEANS concepts

Warm-up
Activity

Multiple options for organisation
(individuals, groups, class)

Time estimate: We recommend spending at least 15 minutes on reviewing major terms and concepts, but you may wish to schedule a full lesson's worth of review if you have delivered LEANS over the whole school year



**This activity is flexible
and can be adapted.**

Key Points addressed

21. **Learning about differences between types of brains helps us understand how these differences affect people's lives, and that those differences are OK.**

Your review activity should cover some or all of the Unit 1-6 Key Points.

Summary

In this activity, pupils should review the LEANS terms and content they have encountered in Units 1-6, especially if these units may have been spread over a whole term or school year.

The review could take any form, and could be at class, group, or individual level.

"The children wanted to make posters and PowerPoint presentations about what they learned about neurodiversity. They were... so engaged and happy to be presenting in their own words."
– Evaluation study teacher

Materials and Pre-activity preparation

Material and preparation time will depend on your activity plan, and also the time period over which you have delivered LEANS units 1-6. How recently have pupils seen the content, or used the neurodiversity vocabulary?

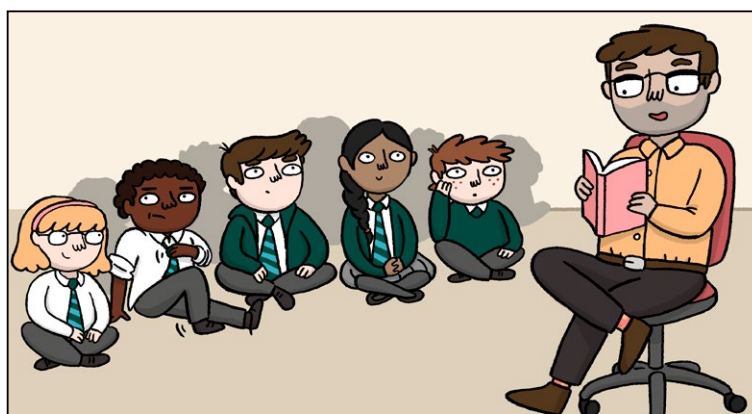
What should we review?

You may wish to spend more of your review time on ideas that seemed particularly unexpected or confusing to your class, to help consolidate those novel concepts and clear up the confusion as much as possible.

Reviewing is also a good opportunity to check on (or reinforce) pupils' understanding of how ideas are connected. For example, they may remember that we can think about fairness in terms of what people need, rather than people getting "the same thing" (**Unit 5**)—but may be uncertain about what that has to do with neurodiversity.

Content available to support a review

- **Key Points** are the best overview of the ideas and terms in LEANS. These appear in the summaries at the start of each unit, and together as a single list in **Appendix B**.
- **Unit Posters** capture at least one main idea from each unit and represent the units visually. *Please note that the posters are not a complete summary of each unit's Key Points.*
- Re-watching **video** resources
- Jog pupil memories by looking at:
 - **Materials** or pupil **outputs** from past activities—"remember when you drew these pictures?" (e.g. from Activity 2.2)
 - **Story images**, especially those that represent activities the class did themselves, or those that encapsulate Key Points.
 - **Photos/videos of your own class** doing LEANS activities (if this is part of how your class/school routinely documents work).
 - **Reflective writing** pupils may have completed during LEANS or about LEANS activities (if this is something your class customarily does).



Checking in on common points of confusion

Reviewing LEANS is the time to check in on likely points of confusion, and go over those issues again. You may already have noted some sticky points during the previous units!

Based on our evaluation study of LEANS, we'd particularly encourage you to check on the following issues—even if you think your class is clear on them!

- Do pupils understand that *neurodiversity* is a characteristic of groups, so **all people** within the group are part of its neurodiversity? [KP 1, "neurodiversity includes everyone"]
- Do any pupils believe that neurodiversity only includes, or refers to, people with diagnoses (such as ADHD, dyslexia, or autism)? [KP1-3]. *This is a reasonable but damaging misunderstanding, given that neurodiversity is so often discussed only in relation to these diagnostic labels instead of all people, including those who may be in need of support, but lack a label.*
- Are pupils able to link the concept of conflicting needs to situations that aren't explicitly being labelled for them in terms of who needs what? [KP 14]



7.2 “Surprises big and small”

Story

Whole class (teacher-led)

Time estimate: 25-30 minutes



Please deliver this activity as written.

Key Points addressed

21. **Learning about differences between types of brains helps us understand how these differences affect people’s lives, and that those differences are OK.**
22. **As individuals and as a class, we choose how we treat each other and how we act toward people who seem different.** Those actions really matter to how people feel and learn at school. We can choose to be kind, respectful, and to listen to others.
23. **The way our actions affect other people and ourselves can be complex.** There won’t always be a “right answer” that will give *everyone* what they need or want, but by working together we can make things better.

This story shows how our characters have changed from the very first story (**1.2**), in which people were quick to pressure and make fun of a neurodivergent pupil when he didn’t act the same as his classmates. Now, we see the class making new choices when another situation draws attention to someone’s differences.

The events of story 7.5 happen immediately after this story. They have been split up for purposes of timing, but you could deliver the two stories together.

Materials

- LEANS story booklet
- Unit 7 PowerPoint. The **7.2** story slides show illustrations of key story scenes supported by captions
- Slides from previous units (optional): see note about reviewing past stories, below.

Pre-delivery preparation

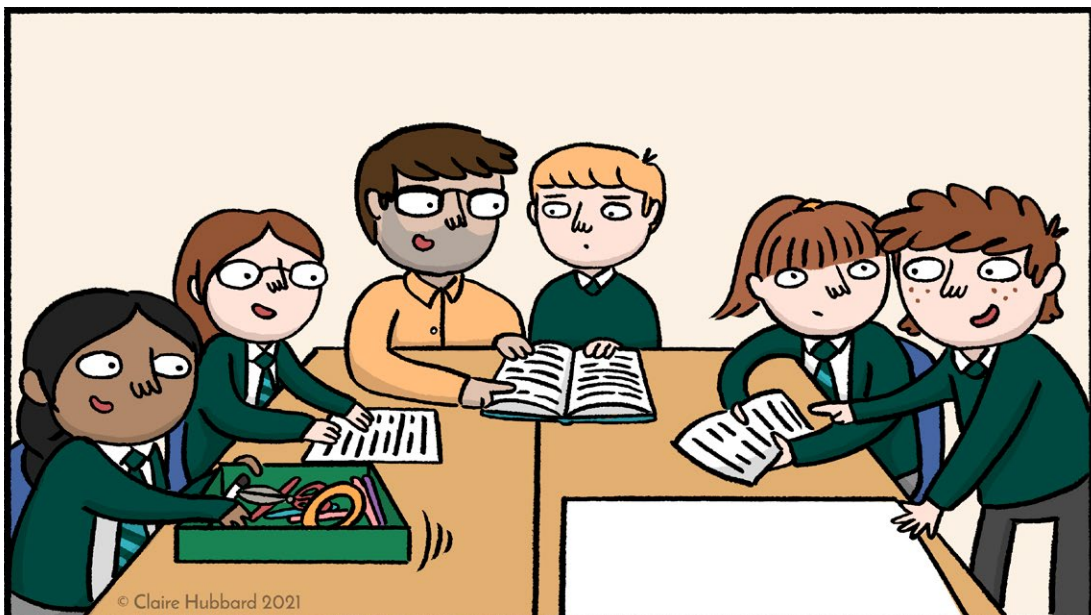
Time estimate: 10 minutes

Teachers: Review the story, and make any amendments if needed for ethics and safety reasons.

Pupils: If you have delivered LEANS over a long time period and have **not** already reviewed the stories, you may wish to directly **review major story events** with your class, to help them identify what happens differently in the Unit 7 stories. The most important story to review is the first one, **1.2**, where classmates pick on Ibrahim when he can't decide during the "Would you rather?" game.

Instructions

After reviewing past story events (should you choose to do so), display the current story PowerPoint as you read the story to the class. Advance to the next illustration where marked in the text.



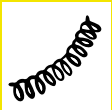
7.3 Ripple effects

Activity

Combination of small-group and whole-class activity

Time estimate: 90 minutes, over at least two sessions.

We recommend completing the example (whole class) section of the activity during one session, and the group work during another session.



This activity has mixed flexibility. Please look for 'deliver as written' or 'flexible' labels on individual sections.

Key Points addressed

22. **As individuals and as a class, we choose how we treat each other and how we act toward people who seem different.** Those actions really matter to how people feel and learn at school. We can choose to be kind, respectful, and to listen to others.
23. **The way our actions affect other people and ourselves can be complex.** There won't always be a "right answer" that will give *everyone* what they need or want, but by working together we can make things better.

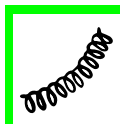
Summary

This activity is about the "ripple effects" caused by our actions—and our reactions to others. As a class, pupils consider a short classroom scenario and use structured questions to think about the first "ripple" of effects that scenario might have on the people involved in it, or on others. Then, they need to think about the effects of those effects: a second ripple. In some cases, they may also conclude that differences are *not* affecting others, but how people *react* to or talk about those differences may be having big effects.

The activity concludes by considering the bigger picture: we're never faced with only one ripple at a time. Our neurodiverse classrooms are more like a pond peppered by rain drops, with *many* ripples spreading and overlapping.

Materials and pre-activity preparation

Time estimate: 30 minutes



This activity is flexible and can be adapted.

- Unit 7 PowerPoint, with step-by-step activity slides
- Optional: Unit 4 slides, with story **4.1**
- Scenarios list with teacher guide
- Whiteboard or flipchart and markers

Review the list of possible scenarios and choose 1-3 for your class to work on (*see instructions*), in addition to the step-by-step example scenario based closely on LEANS **story 4.1**.

We ask you to use the scenarios and type of questioning provided, but there is some flexibility about how you run and record the different steps in Part 3. You could run the new scenario discussions (instructions Part 3) with continuous whole-class discussion of every step, or could switch back and forth between individual/pair/table discussion and note-taking, then a whole-class check in. P7 pupils may be able to do the new scenarios entirely within small groups, after doing the example as a class.

Depending on your choices, you may want notes sheet for pupils.

- Printed effect circles sheets for note-taking (A3 or A4), with one available to pupils/groups for each scenario you plan to discuss. *These are not provided as a separate file. Please print the Unit 7 PowerPoint slides for the scenarios you plan to use!*
- Coloured pencils, crayons, or markers

Teaching tips to think about



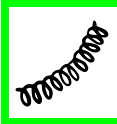
The LEANS design team perceived a "singling out" risk in this activity. Pupils might interpret generically-worded example scenarios as "really" being about a specific person in their class, regardless of what their teacher might say to the contrary! For example, a scenario about "someone who always talks during work time" is relatable because almost every class will have people who do this!

To try to address this issue while still helping pupils think about feelings and choices in their classroom, we've combined fiction and reality. The Unit slides provide scenarios in the format "imagine [LEANS character] joined our class, and they did X."

If you choose to create your own unique scenarios, we encourage you to think carefully about whether they might be interpreted as singling out specific pupils.

Instructions

Part 1: Teacher-led introduction to the ripple effect



This activity is flexible and can be adapted.

Before working through the example based on story **4.1**, make sure all pupils grasp the idea of a “**ripple effect**”, which represents the basic logic of the activity. Like a drop of water can cause a series of expanding ripples in the water, an event at school can “ripple outward” to affect other events and people.

You could introduce this differently, depending on what might engage your class or connect to prior learning. For example:

- A photo of a drop with ripples (one included in the PowerPoint)
- A video clip of a drop with ripples
- A live demonstration—you could do it, or they could do it! Bring towels.
- If familiar from other learning, describe with cause and effect language

We will use the ripple effect as a **metaphor for situations at school**.

Part 2: Discuss effects example based on story 4.1



Please deliver this activity as written.

Your class will first try mapping ripple effects for an instance where they already know what happened and who was involved: the situation from story **4.1**, where Mr. Oliver removes the classroom routines posters to minimise visual distractions for Ibrahim, and creates a problem for Morag (who needs to refer to that information). If needed, review the **story slides from 4.1**—this isn’t meant to be a memory test!

Explain that this first scenario is **practice**, before we think about new situations.

Display the scenario slide from the **Unit 7 PowerPoint**, and read the scenario aloud. Three discussion questions appear below.

The big questions: what happened next, who is affected, what are the choices?

When filling in the ripples across all scenarios, pupils need to think about three kinds of information:

1. **What happened next?** And *then* what happened? And what happened because of that?
2. **Who** does it happen to? How do they feel?
3. What **choices** could people make?

Step through the story 4.1 example. *The PowerPoint is pre-populated with text for this example, but you can remove it to type in your class's suggestions if you wish.*

4. **Drop:** Our first "water drop" that causes ripples is the initial situation: Mr. Oliver removed the posters because he thought they distracted Ibrahim.
5. **First ripple:** What happens next, as a result of that event? Who does it happen to, and how do they feel? There can be more than one thing that happens next (and in this example, there is).
6. **Second ripple:** For each event in the first ripple...
 - a. Does this now cause something else to happen?
It could cause more than one new thing.
 - b. Who does each new thing happen to? How do they feel?

When talking through each ripple, **we recommend beginning with the effects around Morag**, because the story explains this very directly, including how more people get drawn in (Amelia).

The **second ripple** around Ibrahim requires pupils to go a bit beyond the directly stated story events, and may require some additional prompting:

- If someone is distracted, does that affect their work? What might happen if they were less distracted/not distracted?
- If someone near you is very distracted, could it affect you? How?

Pupils might correctly point out that the story tells us about even *more* ripples—like what happens after Amelia tries to help, or Morag going to Mr. Oliver to get the posters back. The ripples keep going and going, and that's only one event, and how it affects a *single day*.

Check for questions before going on to new scenarios. This could be a good point to take a break, if you are delivery the activity over multiple sessions/lessons.

Part 3: Mapping effects for novel scenarios



Please deliver this activity as written.

Display your first new scenario slide from the **PowerPoint**, and read it aloud along with the accompanying discussion questions.

Plot your initial “drop” (the scenario itself) and then consider the **first ripple**. Remind pupils that effects can be **positive!**

When ready to get pupil input per your activity plan, plot some suggestions in the first ripple. *We have provided blank ripple PowerPoints, but it may be simpler and faster for you write on a whiteboard or flipchart diagram!*

Pupils may come up with plausible, but contradictory suggestions (e.g. about how a person reacts). Use your judgement about how to treat these—take both forward in parallel (“Let’s say this happened... ok, now let’s imagine it was this instead...), or choose one.

If most suggestions are **similar**, challenge your class to think in a different direction:

- Is there something completely *different* that could happen?
- Might anything happen to person X? to someone new?
- How do the people feel? Could something happen because of their feelings?

Too many suggestions? Combine some if you can, or select a fairly small number (3-5) to take forward into the **second ripple**. Stress that there could be more—but we don’t have time to *discuss* them all.

Going on to the second ripple...

Remind the class of the questions we need to answer now:

1. **And then what happened** because of the effects in the first ripple?
2. **Who** does it happen to? How do they feel?
3. What **choices** could people make?

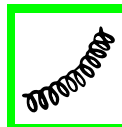
Challenge pupils to come up with **at least one second-ripple effect** for every effect in the first ripple.

When you elicit suggestions, visually group related effects together (as shown on the worked example PowerPoint) to help pupils follow along.

Especially in this second ripple, **new people might plausibly become involved**—you may need to prompt your class. If the class thinks **no new people would be involved**, this is also interesting and worth discussion. Why isn't anyone else affected? What might that mean?

Repeat Part 3 for all of your novel scenarios. *Our design team estimated pupils will probably need at least 20 minutes for each scenario you plan to discuss.*

Part 4: Summative discussion and links to Key Points



This activity is flexible and can be adapted.

How many ripples in the classroom?

The goals of the discussion are to link the individual scenarios to Key Points 22 and 23 (noted below).

Start with general reactions: What have people noticed about our ripple maps? Was there anything new or surprising?

Ask pupils: *"Do you think our real classroom has ripple effects like these? Why or why not?"*

The goal is to reach the conclusion that the answer is yes—and no! **We will never have only one set of ripples at a time.**

Display the image of overlapping ripples (*provided in PowerPoint*).

Our classroom isn't like one drop of water, but like rain. **There are many "drops" landing (events happening) all the time.** They are rippling constantly, involving many people. Those ripples may overlap.

This is a reason it can be so hard for children (and adults!) to know the "best" thing to do. It's really hard to predict exactly how things will affect other people, or what else might be affecting that person now.



Reflecting on the ripples activity and links to Key Points

If pupils have not already mentioned this, draw attention to the fact that one or more ripple maps will include **a mix of positive and negative effects, or positive and negative feelings.**

When we look beyond an immediate situation, we see that **more people** can be affected than we first thought, and also that apparently negative effects can lead to later positives (or vice versa!). What looks like the "best" action or outcome may depend on which people we think about, and how far we look for effects.

Explicitly introduce **Key Point 23:**

The way our actions affect other people and ourselves can be complex.

There won't always be a "right answer" that will give everyone what they need or want, but by working together we can make things better.

Finally, if not yet discussed, consider the role of **choices**. Draw attention to how many parts of each ripple map involve people's choices. Some of these might have negative effects—are other **choices** possible in the future? Explicitly introduce **Key Point 22:**

As individuals and as a class, we choose how we treat each other and how we act toward people who seem different. Those actions really matter to how people feel and learn at school. We can choose to be kind, respectful, and to listen to others.

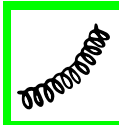
Particularly for the scenarios that involve some pupils doing things differently than peers, the class might conclude that others were *not affected*, or at least not *negatively* affected. The differences by themselves don't hurt or bother anyone else—but the *reactions* to differences may be hurting others, including peers who are observing what happens and might change their own behaviour as a result.

7.4 Classroom commitments

Activity

Multiple options for organisation
(individuals, groups, class)

Time estimate: 25-45 minutes



**This activity is flexible
and can be adapted.**

Key Points addressed

22. **As individuals and as a class, we choose how we treat each other and how we act toward people who seem different.** Those actions really matter to how people feel and learn at school. We can choose to be kind, respectful, and to listen to others.

Further Key Points will depend on your class, see pre-activity preparation.

Summary

This activity is a final step to support pupils to act on their insights from the previous activity (7.3) and the principles introduced throughout LEANS. The goal is to translate the *general principles* and concepts from LEANS into *specific* positive attitudes and actions that would make your classroom more accepting and supportive of neurodiversity and neurodivergence.

The format of the activity will depend on what type of practices, rules, or agreements are present in your class, and whether you want students to make individual or classroom-level commitments (or both).

Materials and pre-activity preparation

Time estimate: 15 minutes

We suggest that you consider the following four questions to help you shape your activity plan:

1. What agreements or commitments does my class have already?

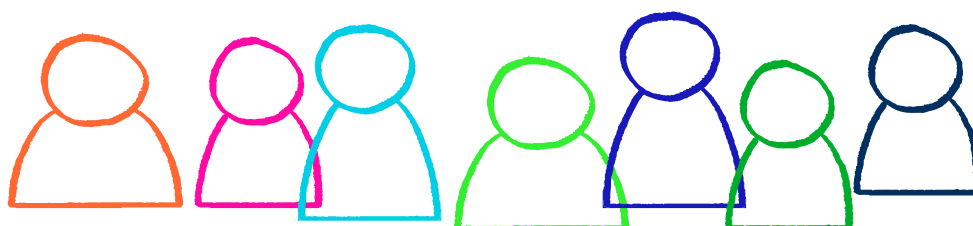
- Do you already have a class agreement, charter, behaviour agreement, code of conduct—or anything with that purpose?
- If you have something, are pupils *familiar* with it? Is this something that is referenced day-to-day, or did it disappear after the start of term?
- If you have something, to what extent might it already connect with the principles in LEANS such as respect, diversity, fairness, and inclusion?

2. What are our priorities?

You can't do everything at once! You (or the class) will need to set priorities for change. Keep in mind that the priorities that might most positively impact marginalised members of your class may not be those that the class (as a group) would propose. Priority areas should have a realistic prospect of progress before the end of the school year.

3. Can we best address priority areas within class-level commitments, on an individual student level, or both?

In addition to, or instead of, working at a class level, you could also have your pupils make individual commitments towards meeting a goal (goal could be self-identified, or identified by class, or by you). If you already know priorities diverge widely across the class, individual commitments may be a better choice than group ones.



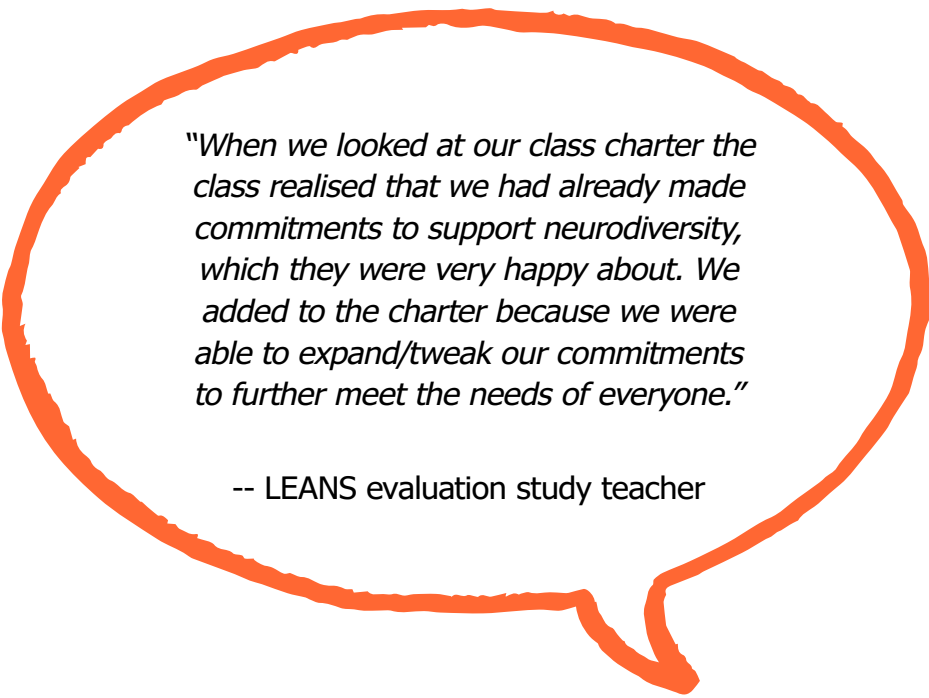
4. Realistically, would we have the time and resources to follow up on any new commitments, and check our progress?

If there is time in the school year, scheduling to check in on the commitments from this activity is a valuable way to communicate their importance, and signal that they will not be forgotten once LEANS is officially over.

Be specific about **when** the follow-up will happen and **what it will be like** (e.g. a class discussion, students receive the individual commitments/letters they wrote for themselves, other). Will the follow-up apply to adults too?

Class activity ideas

- **If your class doesn't have an agreement...** This would be a good opportunity to create one, even if it is simple and short. It might focus on showing respect, kindness, patience, and expectations around helping behaviour. Include some concrete examples of what these actually mean in different situations. It might also have more specific directives, such as the "helping script" Mrs. Adeyemi explains in story 4.1.
- **If your class has an agreement that is gathering dust...** A simple option could be to talk through the existing agreement, and consider how existing items (e.g. about respect) apply in a neurodiverse classroom. Your class's commitment might be to remember, talk about, and follow this agreement!
- **If your class has an agreement that already overlaps with LEANS principles...** Revisit those "overlapping" parts of the agreement, explain the connections to LEANS ideas, and generate examples of actions that follow (or don't follow) the agreed principles. Especially if the vocabulary in your agreement is different, students may not clearly see the mapping between LEANS and the rules they already have.
- **If your class has an agreement but it does not cover similar concepts to LEANS,** it may make most sense to add or revise items to your existing agreement, in whatever areas are a priority for your class (could be identified by you, or by class).



"When we looked at our class charter the class realised that we had already made commitments to support neurodiversity, which they were very happy about. We added to the charter because we were able to expand/tweak our commitments to further meet the needs of everyone."

-- LEANS evaluation study teacher

Individual activity ideas

- **If your class has an agreement:** challenge pupils to identify an item where they think they are doing well and another they think is hard for them, or that they plan to work on. Ask them to record this in some way.
- **Letter to self, with or without an agreement:** Pupils would be instructed to choose a small number of personal goals or changes to their own behaviour, and write these in a letter (or draw, collage, or represent them in some other way). They are told that they will get the letter back at a specified future time. Have they kept the commitments they chose?
- **Reflective writing, with or without an agreement:** If your class engages in any kind of reflective writing activities, set a prompt about setting personal commitments—and then return to this after a period of time, asking pupils to review and reflect on their commitments.

For these or other individual options, make sure to explain whether you or anyone else will see or comment on the commitments. How private are they?

Choose the materials needed for your plan, e.g. note-taking materials, copies of class agreements, flipchart paper...

Teaching points to think about



Addressing situations, not people

As in many LEANS activities, group and individual commitment-making should be steered away from **singling out individual people**, or from highlighting issues in a way that could be perceived as being about a particular person. Perceived singling-out could also start with generating ideas of “priorities” or *possible* agreements/commitments.

Focusing on people over issues could send the undesirable message that your discussion, or any new commitments, are about fixing a “problem person”. Try to keep the focus on situations. For example, the issue of “class members talking during quiet work” vs. naming a specific talkative classmate.

In both class and individual activities, you may wish to set a guideline (or, pose a challenge!) that pupils should avoid classmates’ names as a part of identifying desired changes, or setting out their individual commitments.

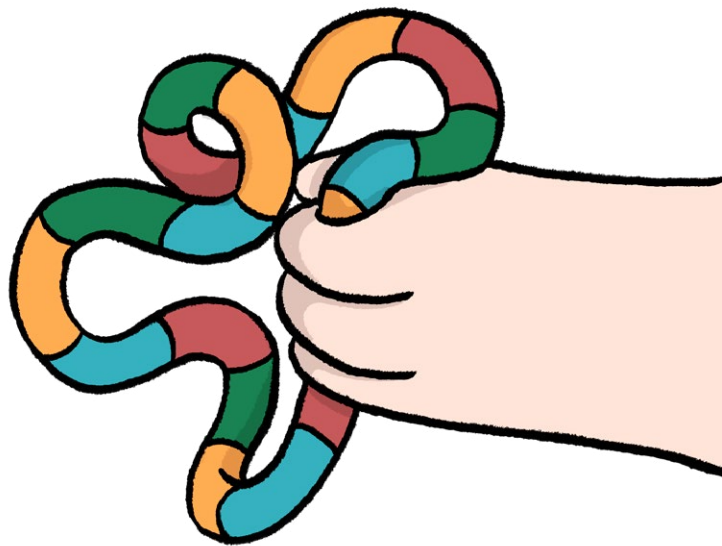
School and class resourcing

We're aware that teachers and schools often face constrained resources. While changes to the classroom lighting or providing supports like fidget toys may be *beneficial* to some pupils, they may also not be feasible. For this reason, this activity focuses on changes to pupil and staff actions (and interactions). Choosing not to tease others or committing to ask before giving help are meaningful—and free!—changes.

If your school circumstances mean that there may be resource for changes to the classroom environment or to provide other supports (items or time), then it may be worth broadening your “commitment” conversations to consider changes beyond behaviour, such as visual supports, how instructions are given, or sensory aspects of the classroom.



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7.5 “Not quite the end”

Whole class (teacher-led)

Time estimate: 20-25 minutes

Story



Please deliver this activity as written.

Key Points addressed

21. **Learning about differences between types of brains helps us understand how these differences affect people’s lives, and that those differences are OK.**
22. **As individuals and as a class, we choose how we treat each other and how we act toward people who seem different.** Those actions really matter to how people feel and learn at school. We can choose to be kind, respectful, and to listen to others.
23. **The way our actions affect other people and ourselves can be complex.** There won’t always be a “right answer” that will give everyone what they need or want, but by working together we can make things better.

This story completes the journey of our characters at Bubbleburn Primary. Like your class in this unit, they are thinking toward the future. Mr. Oliver and Mrs. Adeyemi reflect on the class’s progress, but stress the importance of future choices. Acceptance, respect, and kindness are works-in-progress.

The events of story 7.2 happen immediately before this story. They have been split up for purposes of timing, but you could deliver the two stories together.

Downloadable materials

- LEANS story booklet
- Unit 7 PowerPoint. The **7.5** story slides show illustrations of key story scenes supported by captions

Pre-delivery preparation

Time estimate: 10 minutes

Review the story, and make any amendments if needed for ethics and safety reasons.

Instructions

Display the current story PowerPoint as you read the story to the class. Advance to the next illustration where marked in the text.

Optional: Following the story, have a final discussion or reflections session with your class. What have we learned? Make the most of the time you have invested in LEANS by stressing that *neurodiversity* isn't going anywhere, even if the LEANS stories and activities are over! *See more on wrapping up LEANS in the next section.*

Wrapping up the LEANS curriculum

With your class...

- Emphasise that neurodiversity isn't over, just because LEANS lessons are over. Our class is still a neurodiverse class!
- Remind people about the importance of our choices and attitudes to how other people feel and learn at school. Those will *continue* to be important.
- Make sure children know that you are still there to answer questions, and to talk about neurodiversity and neurodivergence.
- Schedule to check in on the commitments that you made in Unit 7, before the end of the school year.

You could also suggest **age-appropriate books and media** related to neurodiversity. The community-recommended resource list on the LEANS resource website can help get you started.



With colleagues...

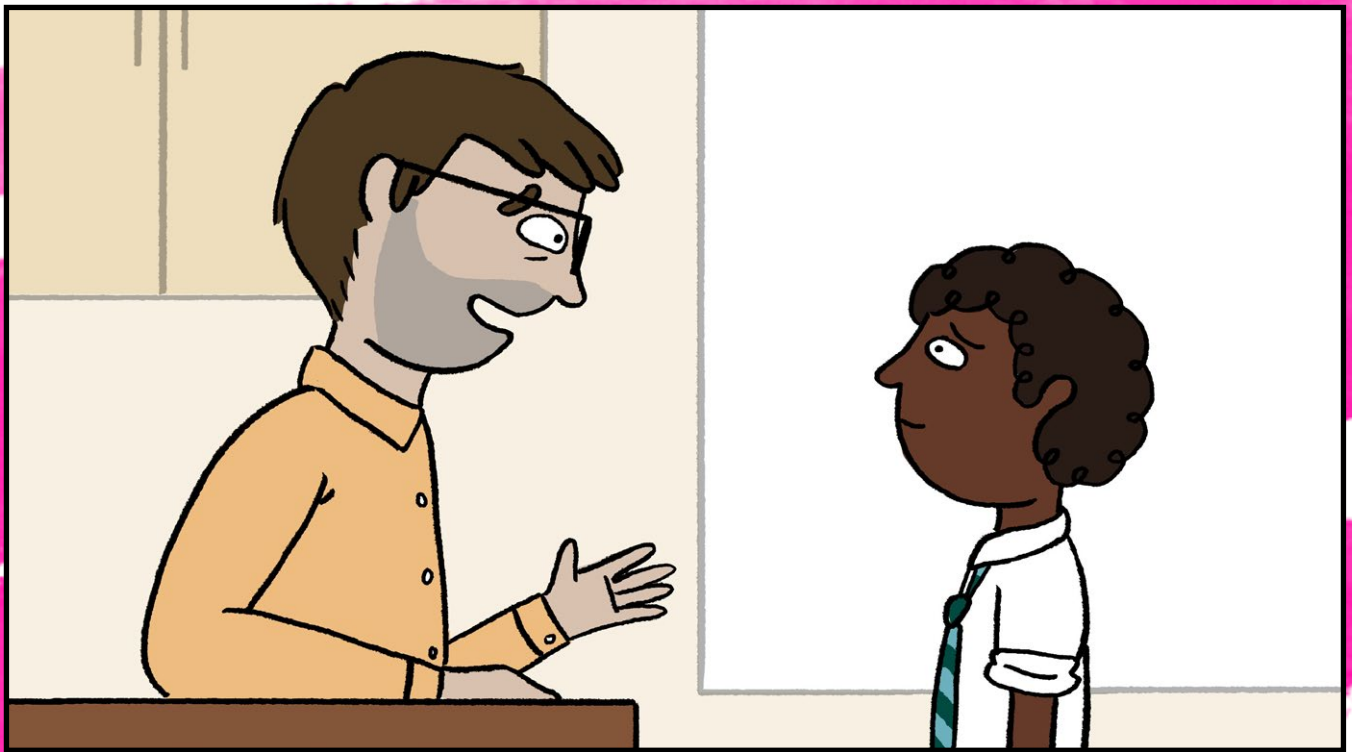
- We encourage all of you to review the elements of your **pre-delivery safety planning**, especially if months have now elapsed since the planning session. Sensitive neurodiversity conversations may *still* be just around the corner, with children or parents/carers.
- If you haven't already, check out the further materials online and the recommended readings for educators in **Part 5, section 3**.
- You can send any feedback about LEANS to the project team at LEANS@ed.ac.uk. We're grateful for your comments, as we hope to do more work on this topic.

Thank you again for committing your time and energy to deliver the LEANS programme, and to support neurodiversity education in schools.



Part 5

Building on the **LEANS** resource pack



1. Preparing for conversations with pupils, parents, and carers

As flagged in the **pre-delivery safety planning** (Part 3, section 3), LEANS activities might raise questions in the classroom or at home. These might be urgent, public, or otherwise put you on the spot! Here are some of the topics we anticipate you might come across, and suggestions for how to respond. The following two sections (focused on parents/carers and on children) are based on input from the LEANS research and participatory design teams.

We know that some educators may already feel experienced with complex and sensitive conversations about neurodiversity, disability, or inclusion—if that’s you, we’d encourage you to scan these sections anyway, just in case.

1.1 Talking to parents and carers about delivering LEANS



We suggest that you communicate with families 1-2 weeks prior to beginning the LEANS content. We have provided a **template letter** for you to complete and send home with pupils, announcing the upcoming neurodiversity topic and linking to more information.

Some parents may have concerns or feel unclear about the materials being covered. The LEANS educator design team helped identify some issues parents may raise, and suggest how you could address these. This guidance is not meant to be a prescription, but help if you’re unsure where to start or uncomfortable with these topics.

Concerns that this is a distraction from “real” support for children with special educational needs

Some parents may already be frustrated at the lack of provision for their child – many schools lack the resources they need to give sufficient support to all the children who need it. We would encourage you to acknowledge that LEANS won’t solve those problems and *is not* an alternative to individualised provision. It’s also not a substitute for more resources. However, you/the school think it is worth making an effort to improve children’s school experiences by addressing what people in the school

community know, do, and think. Lots of research shows that some of the greatest negative impacts of being neurodivergent are to do with how others react – bullying, victimisation, and loneliness are common. LEANS can play a part in addressing negative attitudes and actions.

Depending on how a parent raises concerns about **distraction**, it can also be worth putting LEANS in the perspective of the whole class: *all* children will do this together, not just those with ASN or SEND. It also may sound less distracting to parents in relation to the whole school year: “LEANS is scheduled for X lessons over one term” (or whatever your class’s delivery plan may be).

Concerns about neurodivergent children being singled out during the programme

Some parents, especially those who have a child with a known diagnosis (such as dyslexia or autism) may be concerned that their child will be singled out by the lessons. You can assure them that the team who created the resources were very conscious of avoiding this risk, as discussed in **Part 3, Section 3.2**. In fact, this activity pack has been designed specifically to avoid drawing attention to any particular child in our class. At no stage is a child expected to share their personal stories, nor will you ever draw attention to a specific child in the class or use them as an example.

Instead, the activities include everyone in the class and will draw attention to the fact that we are all part of the class's neurodiversity – because everyone is different – while giving children the understanding and skills they need to be a bit more supportive and accepting of children who are “more different”. We also use stories about a fictional classroom to help ground the learning in specific primary school situations, without needing any of your pupils to feel exposed.

Concerns about increases in bullying

The LEANS resource is not specifically designed to address problems with bullying in school, as noted in Part 1 of the handbook. We do think that taking part in LEANS might help to prevent future bullying. A classroom that better understand and accepts people’s differences should be an environment where bullying is less likely to take hold. Of course, LEANS also draws attention to what we have *in common* with others.

If a parent or carer is concerned that LEANS may promote bullying because it draws attention to differences, this is a reasonable concern, and one we were very aware of when developing the materials. Try sharing some of the steps you went through in adopting LEANS, such as the **self-evaluation** and **pre-delivery safety planning**. What are you and other staff already doing, to minimise the risks of that happening? You may also want to remind parents that schools already teach about other types of differences, and point to specific examples.

Concerns about children identifying themselves as neurodivergent during LEANS

Some children in your class might have a specific diagnosis, but have not been told by their parents or carers. Others may be in the process of seeking a diagnosis, and still others may independently raise the idea that they could be neurodivergent. In talking about neurodiversity, it is likely that individual children will be considering how that knowledge applies to themselves.

If children and their parents or carers come to you saying they think they might be neurodivergent, it's important to remain open and non-judgemental. You might ask them to explain why they think that's the case, what it means to them, and what they would like to do about it (if anything). It's also worth reminding people that no diagnosis is required to think about what a person's needs are, and how these might be met.

Even if you don't think the child is neurodivergent, we'd encourage not to say that – they might be hiding their differences skilfully, or coping at school but melting down at home (as we know lots of young people do). Ultimately, if the family would like to seek a diagnosis you should refer them through the pathway that applies in your area/your country.

Concerns about diagnoses and labels, in general

People have very different attitudes to diagnostic labels – like ADHD or dyspraxia – and to concepts like neurodiversity. Some people may feel that labels give young people an excuse to be lazy, or to feel that they don't need to work hard because they are "special". In other cases, labels might make people feel that they are defined by their problems. Parents and carers may worry about young people "living up to" a negatively-perceived label.

On the other hand, an official diagnosis may be seen as a key to unlock understanding and, potentially, practical support. Individuals or families may be very motivated to secure a diagnosis.

Please communicate to families that **LEANS activities are not diagnosing anyone, and they are not a psychological assessment. They do not encourage children to identify (or not to identify) with any diagnoses or other labels, such as 'neurodivergent'.** LEANS also doesn't provide detailed information about diagnoses and their characteristics—the content is more general than that! This might be a good place to stress that neurodiversity has a lot in common with more established topics like cultural diversity and biodiversity.

If you want to address negative parent/carer attitudes toward diagnoses, that can be a hard job where attitudes are ingrained. LEANS may still be able to play a helpful role. The resources emphasise that everyone can and should work hard to achieve their goals. A diagnosis is not an excuse. When someone has a problem at school, they can be helped to overcome that problem, which then permits them to engage with their learning. In other words, asking for help when they have a support need is what can *enable* someone to work hard and live up to positive expectations.

Concerns about LEANS being a poor use of class time

Some parents may feel that this topic is not a good use of class time. In this case it is worth pointing out that the activity pack ties in with national curricula and inspection frameworks – it will (for example) help pupils meet their health & wellbeing, and citizenship learning goals. Depending on the parent, you may want to be *specific* about these ties.

As with some other concerns, this can be a good point to frame LEANS in relation to the whole year: “LEANS will last X lessons over the term” (or whatever your delivery plan may be). LEANS is only *one topic* among all the things the class does.

In an extreme case, it’s possible that a parent might ask to withdraw their child from this topic. In this situation, we advise you to work within the precedent that applies for your school.

1.2 Talking to pupils about issues in the LEANS curriculum

Questions about being neurodivergent, or about whether another person could be neurodivergent (e.g. a friend or sibling)

As noted above, in the section on responding to parents, it’s important to remain open and non-judgemental. Try to keep from appearing worried, so as not to worry your pupil. If the child is talking about something in relation to themselves, try asking what [X] means to them. You might ask them to explain why they think that’s the case, and what they would like to do about it. If a child thinks they are neurodivergent, and has not already discussed their thoughts with their family, you might prompt them to do so. Ultimately, they will not be able to get a final answer to their question about whether they are neurodivergent or not, without bringing their parents or carers into the conversation.

If a child is reluctant to involve their family, or is raising questions about someone else, you can also remind them that whether someone is neurodivergent or not isn't the most important thing. As we talked about in LEANS, everyone has things they need, and may face challenges. We don't have to know if a person is neurodivergent in order to talk about those things.

If they want to ask about a classmate or another person, this may be a time to remind them about privacy. Your class may already have scripts, phrases, or rules to handle pupils wanting to talk about other people and their personal information. One educator offered: *"It sounds like that's [classmate's] news. We need to ask if we want to share someone else's news."*



Questions about whether neurodivergent people are stupid, lazy or “wrong”

Pupils may be genuinely trying to make sense of what's happening in class, and why others are doing (or not doing) certain things. Maybe the asker is like LEANS character Rashida, who is both very capable and quite black-and-white in her thinking: she knows exactly what to do, so why can't these other pupils do what's expected of them?! Or they may be a Jack—who has little point of reference (yet) for others' difficulties, and lacks understanding that these can be both disabling and impossible to 'try' away. From those viewpoints, asking if someone is lazy may be the best hypothesis the child can come up with.

The thing to emphasise categorically here is that **there's nothing “wrong” with neurodivergent children**. They may appear different from classmates, perhaps very different—but being different isn't wrong or bad in itself. Neurodiversity can help us explain what we see in a way that *does not* blame individuals or ascribe negative traits, by pointing to information processing differences and differing needs.

If your class has already worked through the content in Unit 4, revisit the concepts of **needs and wants**, and how some people may have most of their needs met by how school usually is, while others may need changes or further supports. When people don't have a good fit with the school environment, this doesn't mean they're wrong.

An experienced educator contributing to LEANS suggested that **analogies** can be particularly helpful to make the point about doing something *differently* not being wrong. She has asked pupils to consider different gaming consoles: *"If your Xbox didn't play a PlayStation game, would you call it stupid or broken?"*. That type of explanation might be particularly helpful to a Rashida-type pupil!

Questions comparing neurodivergence with diseases

This is an understandable point of confusion. You can tell pupils unequivocally that being neurodivergent isn't an illness. This is a good place to refer back to the neurodiversity explainer video and associated discussions in your class, and thinking about it in relation to what pupils may know about other illnesses. Neurodivergence has to do with how a person's **brain** processes information. You can't catch someone else's brain!

Questions about whether neurodivergent kids should go to a different kind of school

You can acknowledge that children who need high levels of support or have many *types* of needs do sometimes go to specialist schools. This is because a mainstream school won't meet their needs. The teachers in specialist schools have different training, classes may be much smaller, or they may have special equipment. *All* mainstream schools also give additional support to some pupils, beyond the support everyone receives from their teacher in the classroom. Acting differently from peers or needing extra support *doesn't* mean that a pupil doesn't belong in your school.

If your school is a local school, this can be part of the explanation: it's meant to be a school for people who live in a certain place, which means it's a type of school for everyone. You could also point out that in your classroom, everyone needs help with something sometimes, and that's okay. If all the children who needed help went to another school, there would be no-one left!

Questions about how they can be helpful to neurodivergent classmates (or any classmates!)

Pupils may want to be kind and generous, but it's important to emphasise that it isn't their job to identify someone else's needs or provide support. As story **4.1** mentions, you may want to help someone—but you also need to think about what that person may want, and how helping may make them feel. Your help may not make someone

feel good, or thankful. Most often, we can help others by *not making a big deal of them seeking or getting help from adults*, and not judging them.

If your class or school doesn't already have an established script around offering and accepting/declining help, you may want to create one. It could cover a set phrase (or type of phrase) by which any person can offer to help another, and a set phrase such as "No, thank you" by which someone could *decline* help—coupled with a rule that says we need to respect people's answers! Mr. Oliver and his class model a simple "helping agreement" in story **4.1**.



2. Further resources and links

2.1 LEANS materials online

In addition to the handbook and unit materials, even more resources are available linked from the LEANS website. All of these are also free!

Community-recommended resources: A crowdsourced list of resources relevant to neurodiversity. These focus on resources for children, but also include ones of interest to teachers and parents.

Lists of support organisations for young people and families: These primarily include organisations relevant to neurodiversity (for example, those focusing on Dyslexia and other diagnoses), and those focused on education, families, and children. There are separate lists for organisations based in the UK, and those based in the Republic of Ireland.

Further 2021 evaluation study reporting (please note that more will become available over time).

Recordings of LEANS talks and events

Info sheets and similar materials for schools and families (please note that more will become available over time).



2.2 Neurodiversity readings for educators

Part 2, section 1 of this handbook introduced some basic information about the concept of neurodiversity, and the sometimes-tricky set of terms around it. We know that some readers will want to find out more. We include two reading lists, one for readers who are relatively new to neurodiversity, and another for those who have more experience or are looking for more depth and detail.

New to neurodiversity? Try these sources

You may find it useful to look at these resources in the order they are listed.

1. Autistic Mutual Aid Society Edinburgh (AMASE) Glossary

Online resource. A concise guide to some basic vocabulary useful for talking and reading about neurodiversity.

<https://amase.org.uk/glossary/>

2. Neurodiversity is for Everyone

Article. Why neurodiversity is an important idea for everyone to understand, and how it relates to disability and diversity more broadly.

<https://oolong.medium.com/neurodiversity-is-for-everyone-f375a27aa3c9>

3. Understanding neurodiversity in the context of equality and inclusive practice

Guidance document for professionals. An educators' guide from the General Teaching Council for Scotland, who also have useful guides to autism and dyslexia.

Information about the GTCS guides: <https://www.gtcs.org.uk/News/news/gtcs-publishes-asl-professional-guides.aspx>

Direct link to the neurodiversity guide: <https://www.gtcs.org.uk/nmsruntime/saveasdialog.aspx?IID=8838&sID=11411>

4. What is Neurodiversity and what should schools be doing?

Article. A TES article giving one writer's view of what neurodiversity should mean for schools.

<https://www.tes.com/news/what-is-neurodiversity>

5. A Different Sort of Normal

Book. Primarily aimed at kids, this is an engaging and easy to read guide to neurodiversity, as well as an account of the author's experiences growing up as an autistic girl (but only realising that later). This could be particularly helpful when it comes to discussing neurodiversity with kids.

<https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/443103/a-different-sort-of-normal/9780241508794.html>

Have some experience with neurodiversity, or looking for more detail?

1. Neurodiversity: some basic terms and definitions

Online resource/article. A more in-depth exploration of the language of neurodiversity.

<https://neuroqueer.com/neurodiversity-terms-and-definitions/>

2. Clearing up some misconceptions about neurodiversity

Blog/ online magazine article. Neurodiversity is often misrepresented and misunderstood; this important Scientific American Magazine piece tackles some of the myths head-on.

<https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/observations/clearing-up-some-misconceptions-about-neurodiversity/>

3. The Different Minds podcast

Podcast series. The broadcaster John Offord discusses neurodiversity-related topics with a wide range of guests in this podcast. Start with Judy Singer, credited with coining the term, or Siena Castellon, founder of Neurodiversity Celebration Week.

<https://anchor.fm/differentminds>

Suggested episodes:

<https://anchor.fm/differentminds/episodes/In-conversation-with-Judy-Singer---creator-of-the-term-Neurodiversity-eiadof>

<https://anchor.fm/differentminds/episodes/Neurodiversity--the-new-normal-ehlng1>

4. The Neurodiversity Reader

Edited book. A scholarly but largely accessible collection of texts exploring key ideas about neurodiversity, both in theory and in practice.

<https://www.pavpub.com/mental-health/the-neurodiversity-reader>

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Appendix A: How LEANS was created

The LEANS resource was created during 2020-2022, by a neurodiverse group of researchers and educators. It was led by researchers at the University of Edinburgh. We used a range of processes to capture lived experiences, and practical expertise in education and support for young people. Our goal was to create a resource that would:

- Effectively introduce a whole mainstream primary school class to neurodiversity concepts;
- Minimise risks of harm or distress to individual pupils in the class (especially neurodivergent pupils), and to school staff members;
- Be practical and straightforward for to deliver, even if teachers were new to teaching or to neurodiversity concepts;
- Include respectful representations of diversity in general, including ethnic, gender and disability diversity;
- Be feasible within the resources (budget, time, expertise) of the project.

Every decision made during the design process aimed to balance these requirements effectively.

Note: Each separate phase of the project (participatory design, consultations, school evaluation) received **ethical approvals** from the committee at the Moray House School of Education and Sport, University of Edinburgh.

A.1 The project leadership team

In this phase we constructed a **leadership team**, before applying for funding. The team is a neurodiverse group which includes researchers in education, participatory design and psychology, a teacher, a family support practitioner, and a neurodivergent youth representative.

The leadership team helped to write or review the original **funding proposal** for the project and to make decisions about the early stages of the work, after it was funded. From the proposal stage, LEANS was firmly committed to involving educators and the neurodiversity community in the project. However, unusually for research, our funding did not commit us to the exact content that we would include in the resources, or the type of resource we would make (e.g. videos, a book).

Before launching the design phase, the leadership team set big-picture goals for a LEANS resource—whatever it ended up looking like! We decided early on that LEANS could not target factual knowledge alone, but also needed to concern itself with people’s attitudes and actions in the school context. What do they feel and believe, and what do they do (or not do) as a result? We summarised these as our **know-think-do goals** (*Introduction*, “*Why deliver LEANS?*”).

A.2 Expert participatory design phase

The main goal of the design phase was to determine “what to make” for the LEANS resources, and why. Neurodiversity isn’t yet in national curricula, which meant that there was no clear map for what “teaching about neurodiversity” should include, or the learning objectives for pupils. This meant that the design phase of LEANS had to determine...

- The concepts/content to cover
- Definitions of key terms that we would use
- The media or format of the resources that we would create (e.g. videos, a book, a game, arts activities...)
- How the resource would be organised
- Types of information we would need to provide for teachers.

We recruited a **neurodiverse team of educators** to work with us in addressing these questions. We circulated an advert for participatory team members and invited applications. Applicants were selected from that pool on the basis of their range of lived experience (i.e. different forms of neurodivergence) and professional expertise in education. We also looked for evidence of capacity to commit to the full design process, and knowledge of neurodiversity and associated concepts. The selected team members came from two UK nations and from Ireland.

The team took part in a series of **iterative participatory design sessions** from July–October 2020. These were all delivered remotely, due to the coronavirus pandemic, and led by two members of the project leadership – both researchers. The earliest part of the process involved generating the draft **Key Points**, which summarise the core ideas to be learned in each Unit of LEANS. We revisited and refined these Key Points throughout the rest of the process, making sure they were still fit for purpose.

The participatory design cycles each focused on a broad, school-related topic, such as classroom experiences. They combined structured individual preparation work with decision-focused team meetings. Design team members independently submitted ideas – initially for topic-relevant content, and then for activities which would support teaching of those topics. Then, these ideas were reviewed and filtered by the researchers (e.g. combine similar ideas), and presented back to the group at an online meeting. Team members would help select which ideas to take forward from the list of candidate activities, review potential harms, and refine the initial ideas to help meet the project goals.

The participatory design process also involved a mid-point review to check adherence to our project goals, feasibility for school settings, and coverage of planned topics. At the end of the phase, the project leadership team also reviewed all the materials and evaluated their suitability to meet the project goals. These review phases led to substantial changes in our plans, in terms of what to cover and how to organise it.

A.3 Consultation phase

Having created a package of outlined resources, the project then moved into a consultation phase. We consulted with four main groups of people via different means.

1. **Student / newly qualified teachers:** The trainee teachers received copies of teacher handbook guidance and 1-2 units of activity instructions, and then discussed these in detail in a “feedback session” with a project researcher. This was to help us ensure that the resources would be accessible to relatively inexperienced teachers, and that activity instructions would provide the right level of detail.
2. **Experienced teachers:** As above, teachers received copies of teacher handbook guidance and 1-2 units of activity instructions, and then discussed these in detail in a “feedback session” with a project researcher. This was to gather the opinions of teachers with substantial classroom experience on feasibility of the resources, supporting pupils around this topic, and interacting with parents. We also wanted to check that our instructions, written for those new to neurodiversity, would not be “talking down” to experienced teachers.
3. **Neurodiversity and education communities:** We created and circulated a survey, specifically recruiting neurodivergent people and those with an interest in neurodiversity, including parents of neurodivergent children, and educators. The survey included elements of LEANS including: the project aims; term definitions and key points. It did not incorporate the full LEANS materials (classroom activity instructions, stories, teacher guidebook) themselves as these were already too extensive to be shared in a survey.
4. **People from marginalised and under-represented groups:** We drafted a diverse cast of characters who would appear in LEANS stories and illustrations. We then reviewed this draft cast with the goal of ensuring respectful representation of different ethnicities, cultures, genders, skin-tones, body-types and disabilities. Through a series of interviews, our ‘representation consultants’ helped us to avoid reinforcing negative stereotypes, and to have the best chance that children across the UK would be able to see themselves in the resource materials.

A.4 Development phase

Following consultation, the resources were further developed, restructured and finalised for evaluation over a series of months, turning reams of notes and examples into fully-written-out content for teachers. During this time, the project leadership were in frequent contact with our co-design team members, other teachers, and children in the target age-group. These people have reviewed materials on an ad hoc basis as needed, checking for clarity of instructions and ability to meet our project goals – including minimising risk of harm. In this phase, we also welcomed our talented and committed illustrator Claire Hubbard to the project team, creating the images that bring LEANS to life.

A.5 Evaluation study in schools

The first version of the LEANS resource pack was evaluated across eight classes in four Scottish primary schools, from August-December 2021. Schools were recruited by advertising to the LEANS mailing list and on social media, and underwent multiple rounds of discussion with the researchers before formally joining the study, as an equivalent process to the self-evaluation we encourage schools to undertake on their own before deciding to use LEANS. These schools represented different types of communities and regions of Scotland.

Thank you!

2021 was an extraordinarily difficult and demanding year for schools across Scotland, the UK, and the world. We offer our sincere and heartfelt thanks to our participating schools, who showed such commitment to LEANS in the face of so many other demands. We are equally thankful to all the schools who reached out and offered to support LEANS evaluations in other ways.

About the evaluation

A main purpose of the evaluation study was to see how LEANS “worked” in real classrooms—both in terms of practicality, and in terms of successfully affecting what pupils know, think, and do.

The study included two schools in smaller, more rural communities, and two larger schools located in cities. **Eight classes** participated in total, from years P5-P7 including some mixed-age classes. Every class was able to set their own schedule for LEANS, and delivery time varied from approximately 6 weeks to approximately 12 weeks.

We estimate that 160 children were exposed to the LEANS resources through this whole-class delivery. One class chose to withdraw from the study partway through, meaning that 139 children finished the LEANS programme. Of these, **62 children** were enrolled in the evaluation study. This meant that their parents or carers agreed to share background information about their child with the researchers (such as age and any diagnoses), and their child's quiz scores.

34 study participants were reported as female and 26 were reported as male. Their mean age was 9.84 years (range 8-11 years). 11 participating children (about 18%) had parent-reported **learning challenges** (officially diagnosed, or suspected but undiagnosed).

The LEANS curriculum aimed not only to teach new knowledge about neurodiversity, but to influence pupils' actions and intentions toward greater inclusiveness, respect, and kindness (our **know-think-do** goals). We created two **quizzes** that tried to measure the specific ideas taught in LEANS.

Participating classes did one quiz about **attitudes and actions** before using any LEANS materials (a pre-test), and two quizzes afterwards (post-tests). At post-test, the second quiz was about **neurodiversity knowledge and vocabulary**. Again, while every child in the participating classes did the quizzes, we only are able to use results from the 62 children with parent/carers consent.

The quantitative part of the evaluation study was pre-registered, and you can find further details and copies of the quizzes here (free, no login required): <https://osf.io/38jrh>

Evaluation results: measuring children's' attitudes, intended actions, and neurodiversity knowledge

What did we find out about children's attitudes and intended actions?

This questionnaire had two parts: **multiple choice questions**, and agreement questions. The multiple choice questions asked pupils to make judgements about fictional school situations (such as whether someone had been treated fairly), or to choose what they thought was the best course of action (see example questions box). The **agreement questions** asked how much they agreed or disagreed with statements about their *own* school or classroom.

Multiple choice scores showed that **after LEANS, more children endorsed courses of action (or made judgements about school situations) that aligned with the accepting and inclusive principles**, to an extent unlikely to be due to chance. Some individual questions saw particularly big changes, like the example question on helping a classmate [see box, page 243]. After LEANS, 35% more children agreed that it was best to offer help *if asked*, rather than jumping in immediately.

We predicted that the **agreement question scores** would also be higher after LEANS (greater alignment with LEANS principles), but actually found a *decrease* across the group. What might be happening here? First, agreement scores were already close to the maximum—they *couldn't* increase much more. Second, **lower agreement scores may reflect changed, more critical opinions about what is happening at school**. Take question #2 in the example box, on acting kind to people who are different. Lower scores at may mean children changed their minds about who counts as different, what “kind and friendly” actions look like, or about what their own classmates seem likely to do. We can't know the exact reason for these results, but the LEANS team *do* believe it's positive if children's views evolve as they grapple with diversity topics.

What did we find out about children's neurodiversity knowledge?

We asked a **neurodiversity definition question** both at the beginning and end of LEANS to estimate how many children knew this concept. Before LEANS, **17.7%** of study participants chose the correct definition of neurodiversity in a multiple choice question, slightly worse than chance. After LEANS, **59.7%** were able to chose the correct definition, an increase of 42%!

Children did the full neurodiversity knowledge quiz only once at the end of LEANS, so we couldn't compare before-and-after scores. Instead, we wanted to see if children could **demonstrate neurodiversity knowledge** by answering multiple-choice questions at a level that was significantly different from chance (in a statistical sense).

We found that the average score of 5.08 out of 8 significantly exceeded the chance level of 1.6 correct questions. As a group, children who participated in LEANS successfully demonstrated neurodiversity knowledge and a grasp of new vocabulary after the programme. Results from our child interviews suggest that children were also able to talk about these new ideas, not only choose them on paper.

Example questions from the LEANS quizzes

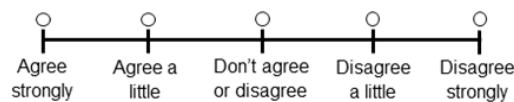
Multiple-choice attitudes and actions question

The person sitting next to you is having a really hard time doing a lesson. They look like they need some help. What do you think is the best thing to do?

- ☐ a. Straight away, you should try to help them with their work.
- ☐ b. You should help that person only if they ask for your help.
- ☐ c. You should focus on your own lesson, and not pay attention to people nearby.
- ☐ d. Get up right away and tell the teacher that someone needs help.
- ☐ e. I don't know.

Agreement question:

"In my class, most people are kind and friendly to people who are different than they are."



☐ I don't know.

Example neurodiversity knowledge quiz question:

What does it mean to say a person is *neurodivergent*?

- ☐ a. The person may learn, think, and feel in the same way as most other people because of how their brain processes information.
- ☐ b. The person says that they are different from most other people.
- ☐ c. The person needs lots of extra help at school.
- ☐ d. The person may learn, think, and feel differently to most people because of how their brain processes information.
- ☐ e. I don't know.

Neurodiversity definition question:

What is the best explanation of the word *neurodiversity*?

- ☐ a. In a group of people, there will be differences in how they look, where they come from, and what they like or dislike.
- ☐ b. Every person's brain has many different kinds of neurons in it, and they do different things.
- ☐ c. People experience the world differently because everyone's brain is a unique shape and size.
- ☐ d. In a group of people, there will be differences in how their brains process information, and how they experience the world.
- ☐ e. I don't know.

Looking for more about the evaluation study?

The Introduction section of the handbook includes quotes from our **child interviews** and **teacher diaries** (Part 1, section 1.2).

If you're interested in the tables, numbers, statistics, and other details, please visit the **LEANS resource website**, which will have information about accessing our study reporting and publications as they become available.

A.6 Revisions and release

Following the evaluation, members of the research team and the original participatory design team worked on revising the resource based on evaluation study feedback. A main task was to refine and condense the teacher guidance and the story content, while supporting the original goals and retaining essential delivery and safety information.

The final resource pack was released in 2022.

Appendix B: List of all LEANS Key Points

Each unit is structured around a short list of **Key Points (KP)**. These points state the core ideas present in each unit.

This list of Key Points **repeats** the Key Points that are listed across the individual unit summaries.

Unit 1: Introduction to Neurodiversity

1. **Neurodiversity means that we are all different in how we think, feel, and learn, because our brains process information differently.** Neurodiversity includes everyone, because everyone has a brain!
2. **Differences between people's brains can be little differences, or big differences.** Most people have brains that are only a little different from one another, and they are called *neurotypical*. However, some people's brains have big differences compared to neurotypical brains. People with "more different" brains like these are called *neurodivergent*.
3. **Neurodivergent people are also different from each other.** Sometimes, we use labels to describe patterns of differences, such as *dyslexia*, *dyspraxia*, *ADHD*, or *autism*. Neurodivergent people might have one of these labels, or several, or none at all!
4. **How I choose to treat other people in class can make a big difference to how they feel and how their school day goes.**

Unit 2: Learning and thinking differently

5. **We all learn and think differently, because our brains process information differently.** "Learning and thinking" includes things like remembering, paying attention, writing, and coming up with ideas.
6. **Just like neurodivergent people have "more different" brains, so the differences in how they think and learn are bigger too.** They may find some things very easy, very hard, or just *different* compared to neurotypical people.
7. **Even when my class all does the same activity, other people are not always having the same experience that I am.**
8. **What I need in order to focus and learn at school may be different to what other people need.** Having different learning needs is OK.

Unit 3: Communication and understanding

9. **Communication with other people is about information processing.** We need to interpret information from people's faces, body, words, and more, and they are processing information from *us*.
10. **Different people may find it easier or harder to communicate in certain ways.** All ways of communicating are useful and important, even if those ways might not be the same ones the people around me are using.
11. **We may not be able to automatically tell what other people are thinking or trying to communicate, if they communicate in a different way than we do.** If we make assumptions, we might get it wrong. It can be OK to ask people for more information.

Unit 4: Getting along together at school

12. **Needs and wants aren't the same.** Just because I really want something doesn't make it a need.
13. **What I need may be different than what other people need, and that is OK.** Everyone has things they need to thrive at school and in their life.
14. **Sometimes, people may need opposite things (conflicting needs). That doesn't mean that either person is wrong.** We may need to compromise about what happens in those situations, to try to help everyone the best we can.

Unit 5: Is that fair?

15. **Fairness in school isn't always about being treated the same or getting the same things.**
16. **Sometimes, it can be fair for people to *get* or to *do* different things than their classmates, because they don't have the same needs.** Being treated fairly helps us be able to do our best at school.
17. **Due to their learning and thinking, some neurodivergent students may do things differently in the classroom.** What helps one person may not help another—neurodivergent people are very different from each other too.

Unit 6: Different ways to make a friendship

18. **There are many ways to be a good friend or classmate.** We can also be different in the types of friendships we want to have. The same things may not be equally important to every person.
19. **No friendship is perfect all the time.** You can still be friends with someone even if you have disagreements, don't always want to do the same things, spend time apart, or are different in other ways.
20. **Trying to think about what another person needs or wants, not only what I want, is an important part of being a friend or classmate.** I need to remember that other people may need or want different things than I do.

Unit 7: Neurodiversity in our classroom

21. **Learning about differences between types of brains helps us understand how these differences affect people's lives, and that those differences are OK.**
22. **As individuals and as a class, we choose how we treat each other and how we act toward people who seem different.** Those actions really matter to how people feel and learn at school. We can choose to be kind, respectful, and to listen to others.
23. **The way our actions affect other people and ourselves can be complex.** There won't always be a "right answer" that will give *everyone* what they need or want, but by working together we can make things better.

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