



Spectrum Tech

**TRADE SCHOOL,
VILLAGE, AND TRAINING
CENTER**

As a Community

W.E. R.I.S.E

 **Disability Advocacy Toolkit for Inclusive Workplaces**

Presented by Spectrum Tech Trade School, Village, and Training Center

Empowering Neurodiverse Individuals Across the Lifespan

www.spectrumtechtradeschool.com

@spectrumtechtradeschool

	Section 1: Welcome & Vision.....	4
	Why Inclusion Matters	4
	Our Reverse-Inclusive Model	4
	Neurodiversity	6
	Ableism	6
	Trauma-Informed Care	6
	Language Matters: Inclusive Communication.....	7
	Examples of inclusive shifts:	7
	Legal Frameworks	7
	7
	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)	7
	Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act	8
	Section 2: Workplace Accommodations & Universal Design	9
	Common Accommodations	9
*	Universal Design Principles	9
	Sensory-Friendly Environments.....	9
	Why It Matters.....	10
	Design Elements That Support Regulation	10
	Sound	10
	Visual Clarity	10
	Movement & Space	11
	Beyond the Physical: Culture & Consent	11
	Section 3: Advocacy in Action.....	12
	Ask, Don't Assume	12
	Responding to Disclosure	12

 Allyship Moments.....	12
 Section 4: Learn from Autistic Self-Advocates.....	13
 Recommended Autistic-Led Advocacy Sites	13
 Featured Articles & Toolkits.....	13
 Why This Matters at Spectrum Tech	14
 Section 5: Additional Resources & Downloads- The Future	15
 QR Code Access the Digital Version of this Document	15
 The Future	15
 What Your Support Unlocks	15
 Training Modules: Building the Future Together	15
Each module to include:.....	16
 Modules to include:	16
 Contact & Partnership Info.....	16

Section 1: Welcome & Vision

About Spectrum Tech

Spectrum Tech Trade School, Village, and Training Center is more than an organization—it's a movement. Founded by a mother whose son's journey defied every limitation imposed by outdated systems, Spectrum Tech exists to rewrite the narrative for neurodiverse individuals across the lifespan.

We offer trauma-informed, strength-based vocational training, therapeutic support, and community integration—all designed by and with neurodiverse voices. Our model centers lived experience, ethical innovation, and radical inclusion. Every program, partnership, and policy we create is rooted in the belief that neurodiverse individuals don't need to be "fixed"—they need to be seen, supported, and empowered.

"We don't ask people to fit into systems. We build systems that fit people."

Why Inclusion Matters

Inclusion isn't a checkbox—it's a cultural shift. When workplaces embrace disability as diversity, they unlock untapped talent, creativity, and resilience. But inclusion must go beyond compliance. It must be:

- Trauma-informed: recognizing the impact of past harm and creating environments of safety and trust
- Neuroaffirming: honoring diverse ways of thinking, communicating, and processing
- Equity-driven: dismantling ableism and rebuilding with accessibility at the core

Inclusive workplaces don't just benefit disabled employees—they transform entire organizational cultures. They foster empathy, innovation, and belonging. And they signal to every stakeholder: *you matter here*.

Our Reverse-Inclusive Model

Traditional inclusion asks disabled individuals to enter spaces built without them in mind. Our reverse-inclusive model flips that paradigm.

We design environments, curricula, and communities *from the ground up* to center neurodiverse needs—then invite others in. This approach:

- Prioritizes sensory-friendly, communication-accessible spaces
- Builds programming around intrinsic motivation, not compliance
- Welcomes neurotypical allies into ecosystems led by neurodiverse individuals
- Creates mutual learning, respect, and transformation

Reverse inclusion isn't just a model—it's a mindset. It challenges power dynamics, redefines leadership, and proves that when neurodiverse individuals lead, everyone thrives.

Section 2: Foundations of Disability Advocacy

Key Concepts

Understanding disability advocacy begins with unpacking the core ideas that shape inclusive practice:

◇ Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity is the concept that neurological differences—such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and others—are natural variations of the human experience. It rejects the notion of “normal” brains and instead celebrates cognitive diversity as a source of strength.

- Neurodiverse individuals may process information, communicate, and engage with the world differently—but not deficiently.
- Advocacy means shifting from deficit-based models to strength-based support.

◇ Ableism

Ableism is the systemic discrimination against disabled people, rooted in the belief that typical bodies and minds are superior. It shows up in:

- Inaccessible environments
- Assumptions about competence
- Policies that prioritize compliance over autonomy

To dismantle ableism, we must challenge both institutional barriers and everyday biases.

◇ Trauma-Informed Care

Many disabled individuals—especially those who’ve endured institutionalization, restraint, or behavioral compliance models—carry trauma. Trauma-informed care:

- Prioritizes safety, trust, and empowerment
- Recognizes the impact of past harm
- Avoids re-traumatization by honoring autonomy and consent

At Spectrum Tech, trauma-informed care is not optional—it's foundational.

Language Matters: Inclusive Communication

Words shape culture. Inclusive language:

- Uses identity-first or person-first terms based on individual preference (e.g., "autistic person" vs. "person with autism")
- Avoids euphemisms like "differently abled" or "special needs"
- Centers respect, not pity

Examples of inclusive shifts:

Instead of...	Say...
"High-functioning"	"Has support needs in..."
"Suffers from autism"	"Is autistic"
"Normal"	"Neurotypical"

Always ask how someone identifies—and listen.

Legal Frameworks

Understanding the law helps advocates protect rights and push for change. Key U.S. legislation includes:

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

- Prohibits discrimination in employment, public services, and accommodations
- Requires reasonable workplace accommodations
- Applies to physical and mental disabilities

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

- Guarantees free, appropriate public education for students with disabilities

- Mandates Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)
- Focuses on access, equity, and tailored support



Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act

- Ensures equal access to federally funded programs
- Often used in workplace and college settings
- Protects against exclusion and segregation

Legal compliance is the floor. Advocacy builds the ceiling.



Explore more:

- CDC's Disability Allyship Framework - [Become a Disability A.L.L.Y. in Your Community and Promote Inclusion for All | Disability Inclusion | CDC](#)
- World Institute on Disability's Allyship Guide [How to Be a Good Ally to Disabled People - World Institute on Disability](#)
- Cornell's Inclusive Allyship Practices [Be An Ally – Accessibility Information](#)

Section 2: Workplace Accommodations & Universal Design

Common Accommodations

Accommodation	Purpose
Closed Captioning	Supports auditory processing challenges
Written Instructions	Reduces cognitive load and anxiety
Flexible Scheduling	Honors energy regulation and sensory needs
Sensory-Friendly Spaces	Minimizes overstimulation
AAC Support	Enables expressive communication

* Universal Design Principles

1. **Equitable Use** – Useful to people with diverse abilities
2. **Flexibility in Use** – Accommodates preferences and pace
3. **Simple & Intuitive Use** – Easy to understand regardless of experience
4. **Perceptible Information** – Communicates effectively across sensory modalities
5. **Tolerance for Error** – Minimizes hazards and unintended actions
6. **Low Physical Effort** – Comfortable and fatigue-free use
7. **Size & Space for Use** – Accessible regardless of posture or mobility

Sensory-Friendly Environments

Sensory experiences shape how we engage with the world. For many neurodiverse individuals, traditional workspaces can be overwhelming, disorienting, or even painful. Sensory-friendly environments are not luxuries—they're necessities for access, regulation, and thriving.

Why It Matters

Sensory processing differences are common among autistic, ADHD, and other neurodivergent individuals. These differences may include:

- Heightened sensitivity to sound, light, texture, or movement
- Difficulty filtering background stimuli
- Need for sensory input to regulate focus and emotion

When environments ignore these needs, individuals may experience shutdowns, meltdowns, or chronic stress. When environments support them, individuals flourish.

Design Elements That Support Regulation

Creating sensory-friendly spaces involves intentional design across multiple domains:

◇ Sound

- Use noise-canceling panels, carpets, and soft furnishings
- Offer quiet zones or noise-reduced workstations
- Avoid sudden alarms or loud HVAC systems

◆ Lighting

- Replace fluorescent lights with warm, dimmable LEDs
- Provide natural light and adjustable blinds
- Avoid flickering or strobing effects

◇ Visual Clarity

- Minimize clutter and visual overstimulation
- Use calming color palettes
- Offer clear signage and predictable layouts

◆ Texture & Touch

- Provide seating options with varied textures

- Avoid scratchy uniforms or tags
- Offer fidget tools or weighted items discreetly

◇ Movement & Space

- Allow flexible seating and standing options
- Create pathways for pacing or movement breaks
- Designate sensory retreat rooms for decompression

Beyond the Physical: Culture & Consent

Sensory-friendly design isn't just about furniture—it's about culture. That means:

- Respecting sensory boundaries (e.g., no forced eye contact or handshakes)
- Normalizing regulation strategies (e.g., headphones, stimming, movement)
- Asking before touching or changing someone's environment
- Training staff to recognize signs of sensory distress and respond supportively

"When we design for regulation, we design for dignity."

Explore more:

- Centre for Excellence in Universal Design [The 7 Principles - Centre for Excellence in Universal Design](#)
- UD Project: What Is Universal Design? [What is Universal Design? – The UD Project](#)

Section 3: Advocacy in Action

Ask, Don't Assume

- “What supports help you thrive here?”
- “Would written instructions be helpful?”
- “Is there a preferred way you’d like to communicate?”

Responding to Disclosure

- “Thank you for sharing.”
- “Let’s work together to make this space work for you.”
- Focus on support—not diagnosis.

Allyship Moments

- Amplify neurodiverse voices in meetings and media
- Celebrate strengths: pattern recognition, creativity, empathy
- Model inclusive behavior in emails, events, and team culture

Explore more:

- Mentra’s Top 10 Workplace Accommodations [Top Ten Accommodations for Neurodivergent](#)
- Life Skills Advocate: Workplace Support Guide [20 Essential Work Accommodations For Neurodivergent Employees | Life Skills Advocate](#)
- Understanding Reverse Inclusion [Understanding Reverse Inclusion - Learning Liftoff](#)
- National Disability Institute: Measuring & Sustaining Impact [Measuring and Sustaining Impact - National Disability Institute](#)
- ODEN: Metrics for Disability Inclusion [Measuring Impact: 7 Key Metrics for Assessing the Success of Disability Inclusion in Your Business - Ontario Disability Employment Network](#)

Section 4: Learn from Autistic Self-Advocates

“Nothing about us without us.” —Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN)

True advocacy begins by listening to autistic individuals themselves. These organizations and resources are led by autistic people and offer powerful insights into workplace inclusion, sensory needs, communication preferences, and systemic change.

Recommended Autistic-Led Advocacy Sites

Organization	Description	Link
Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN)	A leading nonprofit run by and for autistic people. Offers toolkits, plain-language guides, and policy advocacy.	Autistic Self Advocacy Network
Organization for Autism Research (OAR)	Offers self-advocate resources, college guides, and mental health toolkits written by autistic contributors.	Self-Advocate Resources Organization for Autism Research
Autism Research Institute – Self Advocacy Hub	Features articles and guides on disclosure, sensory accommodations, and workplace advocacy.	Self-Advocacy & Autism - Autism Research Institute

Featured Articles & Toolkits

-  ASAN’s [Accessibility Resources - Autistic Self Advocacy Network](#)
-  OAR’s Mental Health Guide for Autistic College Students Includes strategies for self-regulation, disclosure, and accessing support. [Self-Advocate Resources | Organization for Autism Research](#)
-  Autism Research Institute: Self-Advocacy & Disclosure Explores how autistic individuals can advocate for themselves in work and life settings. [Self-Advocacy & Autism - Autism Research Institute](#)

Why This Matters at Spectrum Tech

At Spectrum Tech, we don't just serve autistic individuals—we co-create with them. Our Board includes autistic consultants like Jaime Heidel, whose lived experience with auditory processing challenges has reshaped how we design meetings, communication, and accommodations. Her story—and others like it—remind us that inclusion must be personalized, proactive, and rooted in respect.

Explore more:

-  [What Did I Do Wrong? by Jaime Heidel](#) A guide to preventing traumatic misunderstandings between autistic individuals and their loved ones. Ideal for families, educators, and employers. [Amazon.com: "What Did I Do Wrong?" : An Accessible Guide to Preventing Traumatic Misunderstandings Between You and Your Autistic Loved One eBook : Heidel, Jaime: Kindle Store](#)
- [The Articulate Autistic \(Jaime Heidel\)](#) A blog and resource hub by autistic communication translator Jaime Heidel. Offers practical advice for families, employers, and educators. [Jaime A. Heidel - The Articulate Autistic - Communicate more effectively with your autistic loved one.](#)
- [Divergence Decoded](#) A neurodivergent-led consulting firm co-founded by Jaime Heidel and Katherine Lorelli. Specializes in trauma-informed, strength-based workplace and education strategies. [Divergence Decoded](#)

Join the Movement

Spectrum Tech is building a world where neurodiverse individuals are central—not peripheral. Whether you're planting a garden, mentoring a participant, or reshaping workplace culture, you are part of the change.

[Spectrum Tech Trade School Village and Training Center/Home](#)

“We’re not just offering programs. We’re rebuilding systems.” —Lisa, Founder & CEO

Section 5: Additional Resources & Downloads- The Future

Extend your impact. Deepen your understanding. Join the movement.

 QR Code Access the Digital Version of this Document

Scan the QR code below to download

This is the future. Your support brings it to life.

 The Future

Explore how your support fuels Spectrum Tech’s mission.

Tools, training, and vision that will shape tomorrow’s inclusive communities. These resources represent the foundation of a world where neurodiverse individuals lead, thrive, and transform systems.

Your donation helps us scale these innovations from blueprint to reality.

What Your Support Unlocks

With your investment, we can launch and expand:

-  **Advocacy Handouts** Empower families, educators, and employers with trauma-informed, rights-based guidance.
-  **Sensory-Friendly Design Guides** Reimagine workspaces, classrooms, and community centers to support regulation and dignity.
-  **Reverse-Inclusive Event Templates** Host gatherings where neurodiverse joy leads—and everyone is invited to learn and celebrate.
-  **Autistic-Led Resource Libraries** Curated by our consultants, these tools amplify lived experience and reshape how inclusion is taught.

Training Modules: Building the Future Together

These modules are designed for HR teams, educators, nonprofit leaders, and community partners who want to lead with empathy, equity, and innovation. With donor support, we can scale these trainings across industries and geographies.

Each module to include:

-  Video lessons and transcripts
-  Role-play scenarios and scripts
-  Printable checklists and planning tools
-  Lived-experience insights from autistic consultants

Modules to include:

- *Trauma-Informed Advocacy in the Workplace*
- *Reverse Inclusion: Designing for Neurodiverse Leadership*
- *Sensory-Friendly Spaces: A Practical Guide*
- *Inclusive Communication & Disclosure Support*

Contact & Partnership Info

We welcome collaboration across sectors—education, healthcare, government, philanthropy, and business. Whether you're looking to:

- Sponsor a program
- Host a reverse-inclusive event
- Volunteer with our community
- Co-create a vocational pathway
- Advocate for policy change

We're ready to build with you.

Contact Us

-  Website: www.spectrumtechtradeschool.com
-  Email: Lisa@spectrumtechtradeschool.com
-  Phone: 732-216-1742

 **Follow us on social media for updates, stories, and events.**