social cipher

Neurodiversity-Affirming Behavior Self-Assessment

A scoring tool for educators and school teams



How to Use This Packet

This packet helps you locate the specific conditions that contribute to behavior concerns and staff responses to behavior incidents.

Score each item from 1–5 based on how consistently it's true in your classroom or school. Score based on current practice rather than intended practice, so you can accurately identify gaps.

Each section focuses on a common driver of behavior concerns:

- Trust & Relationship Foundations
- Collaborative Communication with Students & Families
- Environmental & Sensory Supports
- Anxiety and Emotional Regulation

After scoring, total each section and use the interpretation guide on the final page to prioritize next steps.

1. Trust & Relationship Foundations

A consistent, trusted relationship with at least one adult gives students a person to go to when school becomes difficult. Collaborative approaches depend on that trust being in place first.

Scale: 1 = Not in place 2 = Rarely 3 = Sometimes 4 = Usually 5 = Consistently in place

Item	1	2	3	4	5
Students have at least one adult in the building they consistently check in with, even briefly.	1	2	3	4	5
Staff build rapport with neurodivergent students before addressing behavior concerns.	1	2	3	4	5
Students are given some say in how support is delivered (e.g., choosing where to take a break, how to signal distress).	1	2	3	4	5
Repeated behavior incidents are followed up with a relationship check-in, not just a consequence.	1	2	3	4	5
Staff can name what regulates or reassures each neurodivergent student individually.	1	2	3	4	5

2. Collaborative Communication with Students & Families

Shifting behavior conversations from adversarial to collaborative increases the likelihood that families engage.

Scale: 1 = Not in place 2 = Rarely 3 = Sometimes 4 = Usually 5 = Consistently in place

Item	1	2	3	4	5
Conversations with families about behavior open with curiosity about barriers rather than a list of incidents.	1	2	3	4	5
Families are treated as partners in developing a plan.	1	2	3	4	5
Staff adjust how they communicate with students as needed (literal language, processing time, non-verbal response options, etc.).	1	2	3	4	5
Families receive positive updates, not just reports of concerns.	1	2	3	4	5
Students are asked what would help before adults design a plan for them.	1	2	3	4	5

3. Environmental & Sensory Supports

The school environment shapes whether a student feels safe and stays regulated. This is especially true for neurodivergent students.

Scale: 1 = Not in place 2 = Rarely 3 = Sometimes 4 = Usually 5 = Consistently in place

Item	1	2	3	4	5
Classrooms offer different ways to reduce sensory load (noise, lighting, crowding) without requiring a student to leave.	1	2	3	4	5
There is a predictable, known space students can use to self-regulate before escalation occurs.	1	2	3	4	5
Transitions (between classes, activities, or the start/end of day) are structured and predictable.	1	2	3	4	5
Staff distinguish sensory overwhelm from defiance when responding to a student's behavior.	1	2	3	4	5
Spaces used for regulation or breaks are kept separate from spaces used for discipline (for example, using the front office as a regulation space can feel punitive if it's also where students go when they are in trouble).	1	2	3	4	5

4. Emotional Regulation

Behavior is often a response to dysregulation or unmet needs. The adult response shapes whether a student de-escalates or escalates further.

Scale: 1 = Not in place 2 = Rarely 3 = Sometimes 4 = Usually 5 = Consistently in place

Item	1	2	3	4	5
Staff can recognize students' early signs of distress before full escalation.	1	2	3	4	5
Students who mask well enough to avoid flags are still checked in on, not just those who visibly struggle.	1	2	3	4	5
Conversations about an incident happen privately and after the student is regulated.	1	2	3	4	5
Students have a way to signal low energy, such as a check-in card or a scale, and staff adjusts demands in response.	1	2	3	4	5
Staff acknowledges a student's reaction as real, rather than debating whether or not the trigger was a big deal.	1	2	3	4	5

Scoring & Next Steps

Add up your scores **within each section** (out of 25) and use the ranges below to prioritize where to focus first.

Score	What it means
5–11	Priority area. This is likely a significant driver of behavior concerns.
12–19	Inconsistent. Practices exist but depend on individual staff or specific situations rather than being reliable.
20–25	Strength. This is a solid foundation.

Recommended next step

Pick the one lowest-scoring section and identify a single concrete change to implement over the next month, rather than trying to address all four sections at once.

Turn Insight Into Support

Behavior concerns often point to skills, needs, or barriers that require understanding and support.

Social Cipher gives neurodivergent students opportunities to build emotional regulation, self-advocacy, communication, and relationship skills through neurodiversity-affirming SEL games and curriculum.

Learn more about how to bring Social Cipher to your school for free.