

Hidden Potential: Recognizing Undiagnosed Neurodiversity

Module n. 1

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OUTSIDE



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The Hikikomori risk: what are the causes?

The causes that drive a boy (this is a 90% male phenomenon) to choose self-exclusion from the outside world are **many** and often **interrelated**:

- psychological pressure from parents
- incompatibility with the school educational system
- having been victims of severe forms of bullying
- fear of disappointing family expectations
- fear of judgment from friends, family, and teachers

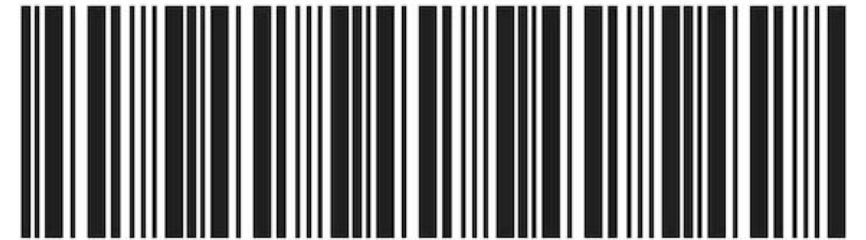


Hikikomori: the delay of the discovery

A diagnostic label has been created in Japan: one is hikikomori only if total isolation (without work, school or friendship activities) lasts continuously for at least 6 months.

But what happens first?
How to detect the signs of isolation?

How to intervene in time?



Hikikomori: the delay of the discovery

The diagnostic delay is due to a general **inability** on the part of families to **identify warning signs**.

Parents associate dangers with the outside world (drugs, violence, bad company, traffic accidents, etc.) and are more serene if their child spends time within the protected home walls, without understanding that the dangers are right there.



Hikikomori and neurodiversity: possible correlations



During the school absenteeism phase, the child begins to miss school because he or she experiences anxiety or discomfort during questions or because he or she cannot study together with classmates.

Many smart kids without cognitive problems have poor school performance. Low grades, pressure from professors ("you're smart but you don't apply yourself"), and the frustration that comes from knowing that they are not stupid but are considered as such by the class group creates a gradual estrangement from school.

What if the child learns differently? **What if his mind, alive and brilliant, functions in a different way than that of his friends or teachers?** What if he is neurodiverse? And what kind of neurodiversity?



Hikikomori and neurodiversity: possible correlations

- ❑ Even mild neurodiversity can cause **frustration**, pain, and often severe depression for those who- for one reason or another-are left out of the "normal" flow of school or social rules.
- ❑ Neurodiversity could be a factor that facilitates the development of a **tendency toward isolation**, even to the point of making a child shy and reclusive without anyone noticing: a hikikomori.



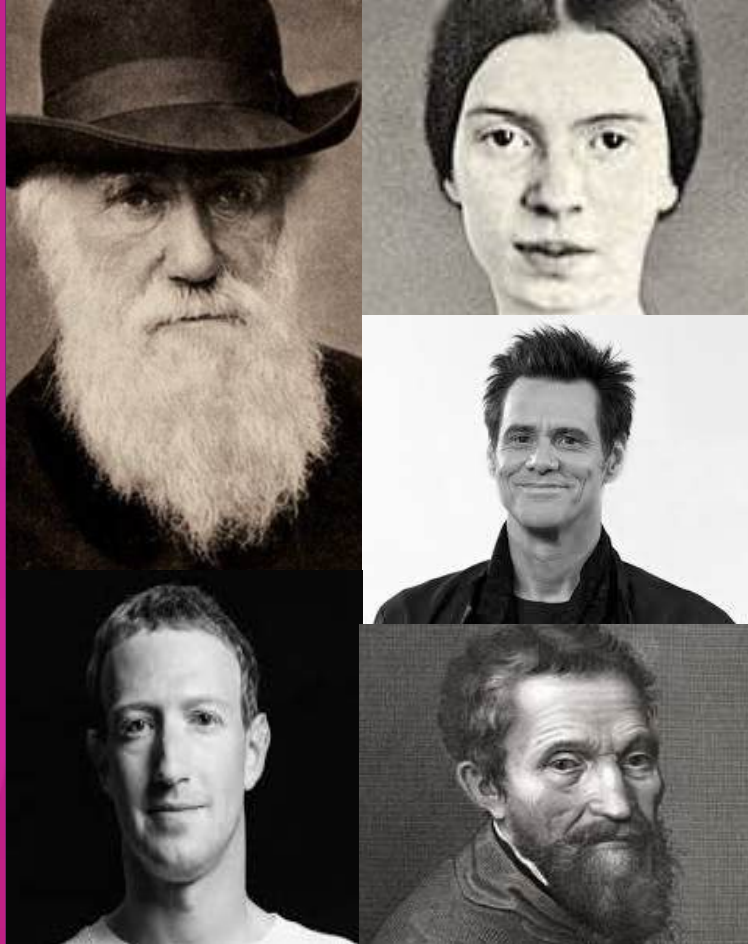
Undiagnosed neurodiversity: OUTSIDE what it is not

Neurodiversity does not mean having physical, intellectual and psychiatric disabilities diagnosed by health and welfare instruments such as:

- ❑ **Autism spectrum disorders**, a condition in which people have difficulty establishing social relationships, use language abnormally or not at all, and exhibit limited and repetitive behaviors.
- ❑ **ADHD** (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), characterized by disabling levels of inattention, disorganization and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity.
- ❑ **Psychological Disorders**, characterized by difficulties in cognition, emotion regulation and/or behavior and impaired functioning in social, work and other areas of the individual's life.



Certified neurodiversity is not necessarily a deficit



Mozart, Shakespeare, Jim Carrey, James Joyce, Bill Gates, Emily Dickinson, Charles Darwin, Alfred Hitchcock, Steven Spielberg, Michelangelo Buonarroti, George Orwell, Immanuel Kant, Andy Warhol, Al Gore, Henry Ford, Bob Dylan, Mark Zuckerberg, Einstein all prove it.

All **certified neurodivergents.**

Undiagnosed neurodiversity: what it means



The term neurodiversity includes any **neurological condition that diverges from the norm** established by medical and cultural models.

The term describes a category of people discriminated against by normalizing activities (with a medicalizing and pathologizing approach).

It is not an attribute of the individual. It is a **condition that arises in relation to environment and context.**



Undiagnosed neurodiversity: what it means



Prof. Simon Baron-Cohen, director of the Autism Research Center at the University of Cambridge (in an article published in "Scientific American") states that autistic people reason differently; they have no "mental disorder."

Accordingly, there are certified forms of autism and **mild, diffuse, cross-cutting forms of autism that are undiagnosable but may result in school or relationship difficulties.**

It is these forms that must be given importance in order to prevent school dropout or hikikomori risk.



Neurodiversity as neuro-variety

The concept of neurodiversity is very different from "different from."

It is a concept, a paradigm, a sociological tool.

The neologism Neurodiversity was coined by Australian sociologist **Judy Singer** in the early 1990s.

"Neurological Diversity" [diversity translates as variety, not diversity] is a subcategory of biodiversity.



Neurodiversity as neuro-variety

Neurodiversity is a term that refers to an obvious feature of our nervous system: **each of us has a unique nervous system** with a unique combination of abilities and needs.

Neurodiversity is a subset of Biodiversity (neurodiversity is a contraction of neurological (bio)diversity not the sum of neuro + diversity) and refers to the potentially infinite **neuro-cognitive variability** within the human population.



Neurological Biodiversity



If we look at any diversity condition only from a medical point of view, we will only look for therapeutic interventions to be done on the person.

If we look at that condition from a social point of view we go in search of what society can do to give that person the same opportunities for self-actualization as others.

To limit hikikomori risk, it is necessary to act on the ecosystem (the school, society, family, dominant cultural values, etc.) and make it more welcoming and open to variety.



Neurodiversity and sustainability



- The greater the biodiversity within an ecosystem the more adaptable and sustainable the system itself will be.
- Similarly, the **more neurodiversity is respected and encouraged within a culture, the more adaptable and sustainable the social ecosystem will be.**
- The concept of neurodiversity is an analytical lens to examine social issues such as inequality, discrimination, or the hikikomori phenomenon and to foster inclusion.

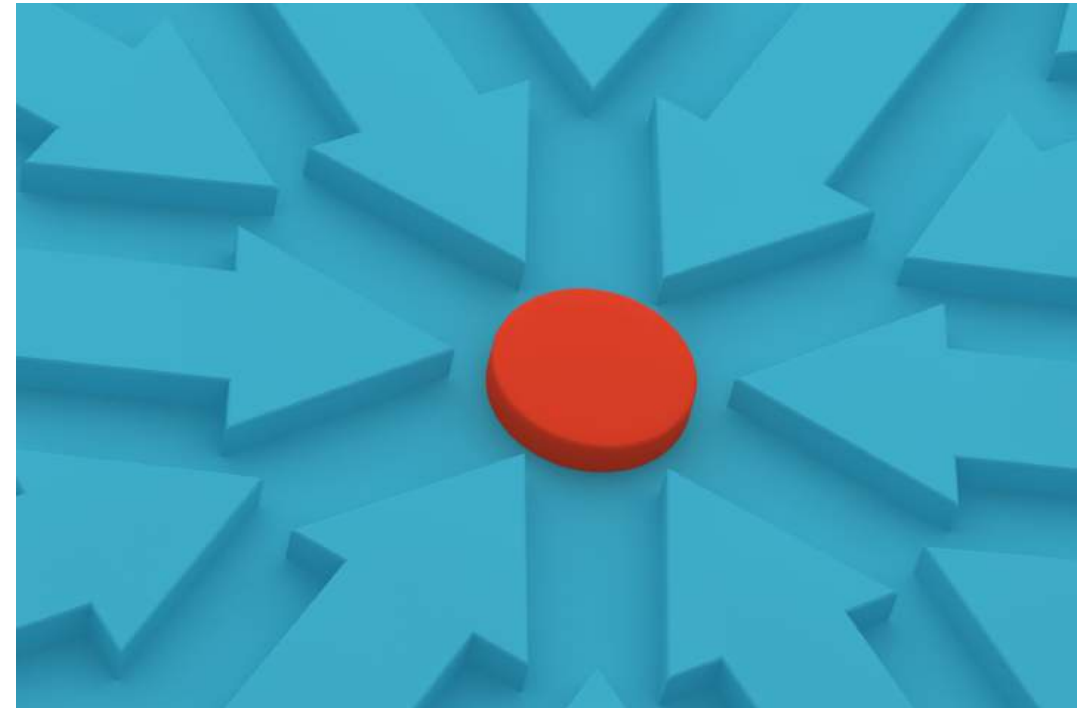


Neurodiversity and neurodivergence

Neurodiversity indicates a characteristic of humanity or an ecosystem such as society, school or work environment.

Neurodivergence indicates a category of people who are marginalized, discriminated against, and excluded because of a neurological difference.

It includes people who are diagnosed with autism, schizophrenia, Down syndrome, intellectual disability, ADHD, etc. and also undiagnosed people who are socially discriminated against because of their neurological differences.



Neurodiversity and social responsibility

Social responsibility arises the moment disability is identified in the barrier and not in the characteristic of the person.

All of us, even with small daily actions, must strive to remove the reasons and causes of marginalization and exclusion.



Acting on context and relationships



- The difficulties faced by people with undiagnosed neurodivergences are not just the problems of individuals. It is not by acting on them alone that difficulties in school or vocational placement are overcome.
- The medical model, which traces a person's disability solely to his or her impairment, should be distinguished from the social inclusion model.
- Any intervention implemented on neurodivergent people must be respectful of their way of being, without attempting to normalize them.

Acting on context and relationships

"If you are left-handed in a world that insists you must be right-handed, being left-handed becomes a disability. If you remove the requirement to be right-handed, the disability goes away."

Today, being left-handed is not a problem, but long ago this diversity was not accepted, and "thwarted left-handedness" created more problems than solutions, causing children to experience a nonexistent disability and undermining their self-esteem.

If the need for neurodivergent people to relate or have to learn like others disappeared, their difficulties in social inclusion would disappear (or diminish).



Making the person flourish



The real goal is to make the person flourish and allow him or her to express his or her potential.
Autonomy and social inclusion are achieved only by respecting personal characteristics.

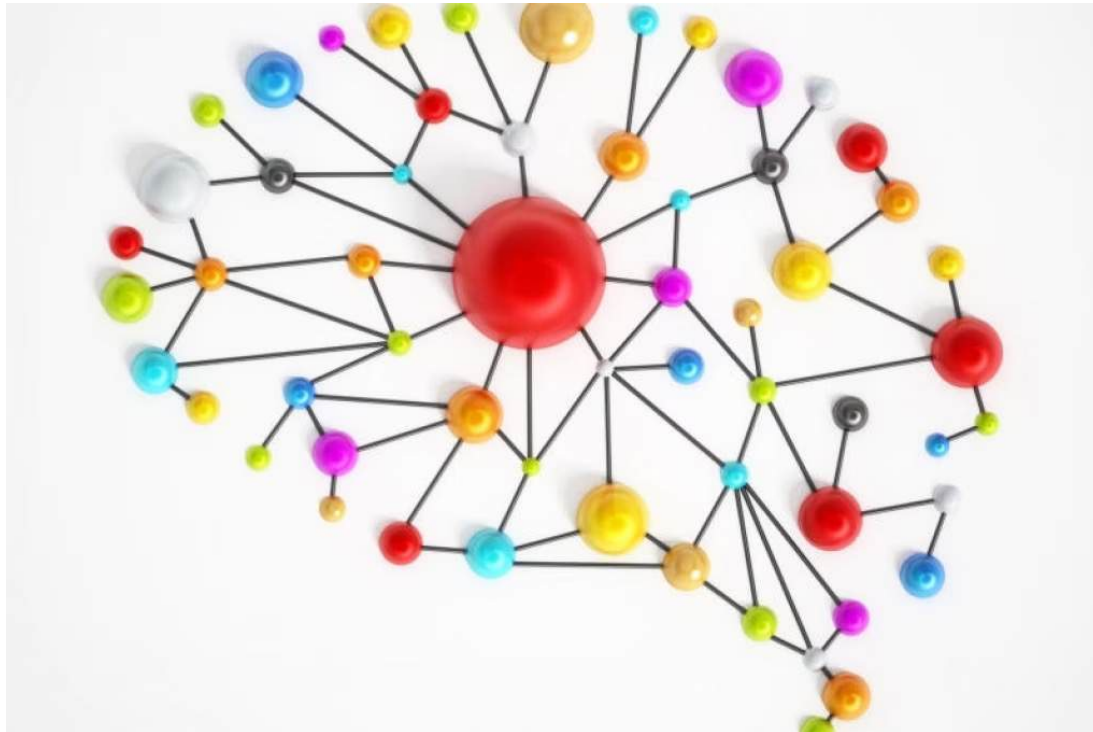


"Modding" the waters



Three million years ago, life moved onto dry land. All of us humans come from the aquatic world, but there are people who are better adapted to salt water, such as neurodiverts, while others live better in fresh water. Neurodiverts are like freshwater fish immersed in saltwater. If we help them swim in a lake they live peacefully, if we throw them into the sea they suffer. It is necessary to create environments, starting with school environments, with fresh and salt water.

The benefits of neurodiversity



Having people of both sexes, all genders, all ethnicities, all religions, and different learning modes in one's school or work environment is an advantage.

Neurodiverse people may do poorly in one subject but be excellent in another, or they may be excellent software architects with an incredible ability to concentrate but are unlikely to be hired because they cannot pass the interview because of relationship difficulties.



Getting out of the standard



From an early age we fall within the quantile, quartile and percentile curves to be in the normal range. They measure our motor, relational, communicative progress.

Neuroinclusion means **appreciating everyone's intelligences** beyond standards.



Break the walls

In the professional world, HR managers highly value a soft skill: being able to relate. A candidate with friendly and confident manners fares better than one who is closed and introverted.

In the school world, compliant, zealous, diligent students who have no learning dissimilarities get better evaluations than those who go beyond the methods and rules imposed by the system.

Thus, a wall is raised for those who do not have **predefined skills** but possess other equally important ones.



The Trainers' role



Can we afford to lose hidden talents? To leave at home people who have so much to say and give?

We must be aware that **it is we, teachers, educators and trainers, who are improved by the diversity of the people with whom we come into relationship.**

And we must also be aware that we will not be able to change, in a short time, the school or society.

Instead, we can help a boy at risk of hikikomori to be more aware of how school or the world of work works and how his skills can contribute to their renewal.

The **module aimed at direct support for hikikomori** or at-risk hikikomori will address this.





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Activating Strategies to fight Hikikomori Condition

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