



IPVET



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

WP4

Learning and orientation material

How to cope with VET students' neuropsychiatric challenges: pedagogical and coaching tips for VET teachers and counsellors

Admission date:
Final version 30.9.2026

WinNova (Finland)

Virpi Hopeakangas
Hanna Lehto
Jonna Malmivuori
Katja Saarinen



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1 Purpose of the material

The contents of the learning material (competence badge) provide ideas and tips for planning and delivering teaching and guidance in a neuro-friendly way. The competence badge provides information on the characteristics exhibited by neurodivergent individuals in the interpretation of sensory perceptions, information processing and ways of thinking. It enhances VET teachers' and counsellors' ability to interact with people who are neurodivergent or who have neuropsychiatric challenges. The course also introduces tools for managing cognitive load, which can be used to support learning.

2 Target group of the material

The main target groups for this material are vocational teachers and those working in guidance roles within vocational education and training. Other staff groups within vocational education and training may also benefit from this material.

3 Expected outcomes and impacts

The learning material (competence badge) aims, through its tasks and content, to develop the following areas:

- The interpersonal skills and awareness of neurodiversity among vocational education and training staff – particularly teaching and guidance staff – will increase.
- Teachers will be able to plan and deliver teaching that takes neurodiversity into account.
- Guidance staff will be able to plan and deliver guidance that takes neurodiversity into account.

4 Structure and contents of the material

The subheadings (4.1; 4.2 and so on) describe the headings and sections of the material in the online learning environment. The text below the subheadings describes the contents, links and tasks associated with each section.

4.1 Taking neurodiversity into account in teaching and guidance

There may be inconsistencies in the development of children and young people, for example in learning, attention, self-regulation and social interaction. It is estimated that in Finland, at least around 10–15 per cent of the population exhibit such characteristics, which may be referred to, for example, as neurodiversity. These characteristics can manifest both as strengths or special skills and as factors that complicate everyday life, such as difficulties with concentration and impulsivity (Juva et al. 2015; Sedgwick et al. 2019). As these characteristics have a significant impact on young people's daily lives and well-being, understanding neurodiversity and developing support and services to meet the needs of young people on the neurodiversity spectrum is an important part of the work of professionals in the health, social care, education and teaching sectors.

OBLIGATORY TASK: Please look at the attached presentation. Compiled as part of the IPVET project, it is based on various sources and covers neurodiversity, as well as how to take it into account in everyday student life and in teaching and guidance that caters for neurodiverse students. Also consider what insights you will take with you into your daily teaching and guidance work?

Link: [Neuro-affirming teaching and guidance in VET](https://www.winnova.fi/wp-content/) (https://www.winnova.fi/wp-content/

OPTIONAL ADDITIONAL TASK: Familiarise yourself with the guide below on understanding and supporting children and young people with neurodiverse conditions.

Link: [A Guide to Understanding and Supporting Neurodiverse Persons](https://www.drroseann.com/post/the-neurodivergent-umbrella) (https://www.drroseann.com/post/the-neurodivergent-umbrella)

4.2 What is ADHD?

OBLIGATORY TASK: Watch the video below, which explains what ADHD is. Think about what new things you learnt from it.

Link: [What ADHD is?](https://youtu.be/Rfcdx3qm77M?si=FZ5csbW6_ufee-Sw) (https://youtu.be/Rfcdx3qm77M?si=FZ5csbW6_ufee-Sw)

OPTIONAL ADDITIONAL TASK: Take a listen to at least one episode of the podcast – Divergent Paths. This podcast offers real talk and practical strategies for navigating executive dysfunction, emotional regulation, masking, and more. It is the podcast for people with ADHD, autism and other neurodivergent persons.

Link: [Divergent Paths podcast](https://open.spotify.com/show/5bdpumvFut291qTo7AJFkf) (https://open.spotify.com/show/5bdpumvFut291qTo7AJFkf)

4.3 Supporting students with concentration-related challenges

It is normal to experience temporary difficulties with concentration. Sometimes, however, they are caused by a stressful life situation, an illness or a syndrome. (Source: <https://www.mielenterveystalo.fi/en>)

Concentration is built on a foundation of sufficient sleep, exercise, nutrition and healthy relationships. Please bear in mind that, as a teacher or tutor, you can support your students in these areas.

OBLIGATORY TASK: Watch the video below on ways to improve concentration. Think about which methods help you concentrate. Which methods could help your students concentrate better?

Link: [How to Improve Focus and Concentration While Studying](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H1BQ6hVoo9Y) (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H1BQ6hVoo9Y)

4.4 How does depression manifest itself?

Did you know that more than one in five young people in Finland experiences symptoms of depression? Depression is a common mental health condition affecting around six per cent of the Finnish population. It is not always obvious, particularly in young people. (Source: <https://www.terveyskirjasto.fi/>)

OBLIGATORY TASK: Watch the video below about depression. Think about whether you can identify a 'black dog' in your own life. How would you like the 'black dog' to be discussed with you? How would you approach someone you notice has a 'black dog' in their life?

Link: [Video about depression](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XiCrniLQGYc) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XiCrniLQGYc>)

4.5 Supporting students in managing their own learning, work and activities

Executive function difficulties are common among young people. Executive disfunction can affect daily life and well-being. These challenges or deficits manifest as difficulties in getting started, planning, organising, and completing tasks. They can lead to a lack of initiative, inflexibility and problems with time management and emotional regulation. These challenges are evident in everyday tasks, working life and social relationships. These challenges are often associated with ADHD or autism. (Source: <https://www.terveyskyla.fi/en>)

OBLIGATORY TASK: Explore the website below, which contains information on executive functioning and time as well as stress management

Link: [Information on executive functioning and stress management](https://www.hyvaksymys.fi/en/course/learn-life-skills-self-help-course/stress-management/) (<https://www.hyvaksymys.fi/en/course/learn-life-skills-self-help-course/stress-management/>)

4.6 Developing students' emotional regulation skills

Emotional regulation is the ability to manage and express one's emotions in a healthy way. It is an important part of mental wellbeing. These skills include managing strong emotions and reactions, which is particularly important in stressful or challenging situations. (Source: <https://www.mielen-terveystalo.fi/en>)

OBLIGATORY TASK: Familiarise yourself with the material on emotions below. Also consider how you manage your own emotions. What emotional regulation skills are needed in your work, and how can you help students to regulate their emotions? If possible, discuss your emotional regulation skills with a colleague or someone close to you.

Link: [Material on emotions](https://www.hyvaksymys.fi/en/course/learn-life-skills-self-help-course/emotions/) (<https://www.hyvaksymys.fi/en/course/learn-life-skills-self-help-course/emotions/>)

4.7 Tools to support learning and managing cognitive load

For someone with a neurological condition, trying harder usually doesn't make everyday life any easier. Often, the solution lies in making daily life a little less stressful. There are many tools and methods that can help with sensory regulation and coping. Important reminders:

- They don't work in the same way for everyone.

- None of them are 'guaranteed to work'.
- The same aid will work differently for each individual.

OBLIGATORY TASK: Watch the video below about different learning support tools. Think about which ones would be suitable for your own lessons.

Link: [Video on learning support tools \(English subtitles\)](https://youtu.be/4K399_1n7MA) (https://youtu.be/4K399_1n7MA)

OPTIONAL ADDITIONAL TASK: Explore digital aids such as a timer. For example, you can use a timer to schedule breaks and tasks. Project the timer onto a screen so that everyone can see it throughout the lesson.

Link: [Explore digital aids](https://classroomscreen.com/app/t/local-only-team-id/sd/3772bade-e1c9-48a9-b5a8-44e371e79881/s/6f50c99a-79bd-49a4-971a-22975dc754eb) (https://classroomscreen.com/app/t/local-only-team-id/sd/3772bade-e1c9-48a9-b5a8-44e371e79881/s/6f50c99a-79bd-49a4-971a-22975dc754eb)

Start from scratch > Timer (also explore other tools).

OPTIONAL ADDITIONAL TASK: Find out about the Pomodoro Technique and its benefits.

Link: [Pomodoro-technique](https://arc.duke.edu/pomodoro-technique/) (https://arc.duke.edu/pomodoro-technique/)

4.8 Classroom poster on neuro-friendly teaching and guidance

OBLIGATORY TASK: Print out a 'Neuro-Friendly Teacher/Instructor' poster and display it in your office or another suitable place.



Kuva 1: 'Neuro-Friendly Teacher/Instructor' poster

The contents of the poster:

- Plan ahead and make sure students are aware of the clear structure of the lesson.
- Start with an easy task so that everyone can get involved.
- Break tasks down into smaller parts.
- Make use of techniques such as the Pomodoro Technique (use a timer, such as an hour-glass or a virtual Timer Timer).
- Take frequent breaks; physical activity is important.
- Give positive feedback whenever possible.
- Avoid misinterpreting students' behaviour.
 - For example, if a student doesn't get started, this may be interpreted as laziness.
 - If a student leaves, this is interpreted as defiance.
 - If a student is restless, this is often seen as a lack of motivation.
- Often, these behaviours stem from an excessive workload and difficulties with task management and self-regulation.

Providing clear and proactive teaching for neurodivergent students also improves teaching for the whole class.

4.9 Competence test

These are self-marking exercises in the online learning environment. The correct answer is highlighted in the answer options. There is one correct answer for each question. Questions may be presented in any order or in a randomised order each time.

Question 1: What proportion of the Finnish population is estimated to fall within the neurodiversity spectrum?

Answer options:

- around 50%
- around 1–5%
- around 35–40%
- around 10–15% (correct)

Question 2: What is a typical reason why a person on the neurodiversity spectrum might mask?

Answer options:

- To improve memory and concentration
- A desire to provoke and attract attention
- Deliberate lying to achieve one's own goals
- A strong need to fit in and avoid being judged (correct)

Question 3: From a teacher's perspective, what is the most important way to support neurodiverse students in their studies?

Answer options:

- Provide structured teaching and clear, step-by-step instructions. (Correct)
- Avoid all interaction with the student.
- Use only verbal instructions without visual support.
- Introduce constant surprises into lessons.

Question 4: Which of the following best describes the nature of depression and its effect on a person?

Answer options:

- Depression is usually a temporary low mood that goes away on its own without treatment.
- Depression is a debilitating condition that can impair a person's ability to function and have a wide-ranging impact on daily life. (Correct)
- Depression is caused solely by an unhealthy lifestyle.
- Depression only affects people of a certain age.

Question 5: Which of the following best describes how one should approach emotions and how they can be managed?

Answer options:

- Emotions cannot be prevented but recognising them and practising coping strategies can help you to cope with situations. (Correct)
- Emotions should be ignored in situations where they interfere with functioning so that decision-making remains rational.
- Emotions cannot be influenced in any way.
- Emotions should be suppressed to reduce their impact on behaviour.

Question 6: Which of the following best describes the potential strengths of neurodivergent people?

Answer options:

- Neurodiversity mainly refers to learning difficulties without any strengths.
- People with neurodiversity only succeed at simple tasks.
- People with neuroatypicality may have strengths such as the ability to concentrate, creativity or an eye for detail. (Correct)
- The strengths of people with neuroatypicality cannot be utilised in the workplace.

Question 7: In what ways can learning support tools make a teacher's work with neurodivergent students easier?

Answer options:

- They can clarify the structure of teaching, but they often have little impact on how smoothly a teacher's work runs.
- They reduce the need for individualised teaching, as they work in the same way for all students.
- They help organise teaching, support students' independence, and reduce the need for constant guidance. (Correct)
- They work best in one-to-one situations, but their benefits in group settings are generally limited.

Question 8: Which of the following best describes the support provided for process-oriented guidance in learning?

Answer options:

- The student is given a task without instructions so that they can learn independently.
- The student is supported in planning, carrying out, and evaluating their task step by step. (Correct)
- The student always completes tasks alone without help.
- The focus is solely on the outcome of the task, not the process of working towards it.

Question 9: Which of the following best describes how ADHD is considered and how learning is supported in teaching situations?

Answer options:

- ADHD may affect learning and concentration, but clear structures and pedagogical approaches can minimise the impact.
- ADHD is often associated with challenges relating to attention and executive function, so clear structures, predictability and visual aids can facilitate learning. (Correct)
- Students with ADHD benefit particularly from self-directed and flexible working without strict structures.
- The effects of ADHD on learning generally diminish with age, meaning that special support measures are usually not required in vocational education.

Question 10: Which of the following options best describes effective pedagogical methods for reducing a student's workload and supporting them?

Answer options:

- Students are motivated by increasing the difficulty of tasks at the start of the lesson and reducing the number of breaks.
- Tasks are set as large blocks so that students learn to manage the whole.

- The lesson is clearly structured, tasks are broken down into small parts, and work is supported by breaks, timers, and positive feedback. (Correct)
- Students' difficulties are primarily interpreted as a lack of motivation.

4.10 Further reading

- Dunne, Maureen (2024). The Neurodiversity Edge: The Essential Guide to Embracing Autism, ADHD, Dyslexia, and Other Neurological Differences for Any Organization.
- Gallo, Kim (2023). The Pivot for Parents and Educators: Looking at autism and ADHD through a different lense – How understanding the neurodivergent mind can change our thoughts and feelings about a diagnosis.
- Nerenberg, Jenara (2021). Divergent Mind – Thriving in a World That Wasn't Designed for You.

5 How to publish the material & copyrights

5.1 Publication of material

At WinNova, the 'Neuro-friendly Teaching and Guidance' competence badge has been incorporated into our overall competence badge scheme. This scheme is available to staff via the itslearning learning environment. Prior to the final release of the badge, feedback was gathered from WinNova staff on the trial course for the 'Neuro-friendly Teaching and Guidance' badge. This feedback informed the finalisation of the badge's content.

While the competence badge is not compulsory for WinNova's teaching and guidance staff, completion is recommended for all. Once they have completed the badge, teachers and members of staff in guidance roles can download the certificate from the itslearning environment and record its completion in WinNova's Sympa system by attaching the certificate to the relevant entry. Badge completion is monitored at WinNova as part of staff development discussions.

The material has been produced as part of the Erasmus+ funded IPVET project and is freely available to all. The rights to use and modify the material are set out in section 5.2.

5.2 Copyright

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