

Exploring Your Strengths and Sticking Points (yr 9-13) Educator Guide



What's This About?

This activity helps students explore their own strengths and sticking points. Through this guided reflection, students will identify ways they think, feel, notice and act that help them thrive, as well as things that can make learning or everyday situations trickier. Use this activity alongside our **Neurodivergent Learner Characteristics Tool** (yr 9-13) to gain insights about your students.

Getting Set Up and Ready

Before you start:

This activity works best when the classroom feels safe, calm and non-judgemental, so students feel comfortable thinking and talking about themselves. Using tools like **Welcome to My Brain** over time can help build a shared language and culture where all brains are noticed, supported and celebrated.

You need:

Exploring Your Strengths and Sticking Points (yr 9-13) one per student, highlighters and pencils

Suggested Lesson Flow

Introduce: Today we are going to think about our own strengths and sticking points, so that we can understand our own brains a little bit better.

Ask: Use think, pair share or similar discussion technique to give time for thinking as well as sharing ideas:

- What does 'strength' mean? What does 'sticking point' mean?
- Why might it be important to understand these in yourself?

Clarify:

- A **strength** is anything in the way you think, feel, notice, or act that can enable you to learn, solve problems, create, or connect with others effectively.
- A **sticking point** is anything in or around you that creates friction, constrains your progress, or stops your current strategies from working effectively.
- **Categories we are using to explore these are:** Thinking and learning, feeling and your inner world, connecting and your outer world.

TOP TIPS!

Be precise and deliberate with language about strengths and sticking points. If students bring in other words, re-direct back to strengths and sticking points and these meanings described.

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If wanted and suitable for your particular group, ask: Use think, pair share or similar discussion technique to give time for thinking as well as sharing ideas:

- Who can think of an example of a strength they have, or that they have noticed in someone else, that links to “the way you think, feel, notice or act that **HELPS** you learn?” Give a sentence frame for students to respond: “I have a strength that is.... ”
- Who can think of an example of a sticking point they have, or that they have noticed in someone else, that links to “the way you think, feel, notice or act that **MAKES THINGS TRICKIER** for you as you learn?” Give a sentence frame for students to respond: “It’s a sticking point when...”

TOP TIPS!

Make sure the discussion stays well focused. Draw attention to key ideas as needed:

- **Discussing strengths does not equal bragging:** Everyone has strengths that can help us learn and thrive
- **Sticking points are not failures:** Help students reframe with “It’s a sticking point when...”
- **Separate person from problem:** We’re talking about *a sticking point*, not *a sticky person*; We name the sticking point, not the person
- **Normalize and universalize:** Everyone has strengths and sticking points

Give task:

- Hand out **Exploring Your Strengths and Sticking Points (yr 9-13)**, highlighters and pencils
- Model with one section as needed
- Support students to work in ways that suit them best, and support with reading and recording as needed
- Remind students to put their name on their work!
- Stress that this is quiet and individual work, not a checklist or a competition

Gather back together and wind up:

- If wanted, invite students to share briefly using sentence frames: “I noticed... I wondered... I realised...”, rather than having them list any of their own strengths or sticking points.

Possible Next Steps

Use our reflective prompts to translate this information into practice. You might also consider:

- Keeping a summarised list of students’ strengths and sticking points in sight as you plan, reflect or work towards your own professional goals
- Sharing some strengths and sticking points with parents and whānau
- Revisiting these with students over time

Responding to Strengths and Sticking Points alongside Neurodivergent Learner Characteristics

Now that you have gathered information, use these reflective questions to what students may need to learn, participate and thrive. Neuroinclusion is not about “fixing” students, but is about noticing patterns, removing barriers, and making small, practical changes that help more learners work from their strengths more often.

Explore and Ponder

- What patterns or themes stand out to you across these student responses?
- What, if anything, surprises you about what students have said?
- Where do you notice tensions or overlaps between strengths and challenges (e.g. deep focus and losing track of time)?
- What feels most familiar for your students, and what feels less visible or more easily missed?

Translate into Neuroinclusive Teaching

Responding to: Thinking and Learning

- How could I tweak lessons so students can use their strengths more often and more deliberately?
- How can I run lessons to reduce barriers around getting started, managing time, or keeping track of instructions and materials?

Responding to: Feelings and Inner World

- How can I build on what students see as their strengths to help them feel valued and capable?
- What routines in my classroom could help students manage frustration or feeling overwhelmed, especially during challenging moments?

Responding to: Connecting and Outer World

- How can I create social expectations so that students are more likely to work with their strengths (e.g. have clearer expectations, choice in social interaction, opportunities to notice and question)?
- How can I minimize sensory or environmental barriers to learning and thriving?