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NEurodivergent peer Support Toolkit (**NEST**) launch

- Cameras and microphones are automatically disabled.
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- To turn on live captions, click on the 'Caption' button and click 'Turn on live captions'.
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<https://salvesen-research.ed.ac.uk/research/nest-neurodivergent-peer-support-toolkit>



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Thank you for joining us this afternoon!
Please note that this session will be recorded.

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Launch agenda

- Welcome and introductions
- Why we developed NEST
- How we developed NEST – the co-design process
- Introducing the NEST resources
- Our NEST feasibility study
- Next steps for schools
- Q&A
- Finish



Neurodivergent young person co-design group:

Cameron Coupar, Jamie Yates, Minerva Fletcher-Watson, Jacob McKinlay and four others who chose not to include their names.

Adult co-design group:

Carrie Watts, Dr Elliott Spaeth, Harriet Axbey, Marisa McKinlay, Natalie Macpherson, Nicola Daniel, Rose Bangs, Victor, and one other who chose not to include their name.

Welcome & Introductions



Dr Catherine Crompton
Principal Investigator



Francesca Fotheringham
Postdoctoral researcher



Charlotte Webber
Postdoctoral researcher



Dr Katie Cebula
Co-Investigator



Dr Sarah Foley
Co-Investigator



Professor Sue Fletcher-Watson
Co-Investigator

University of Edinburgh research team





Most people are **neurotypical**. Because they are the largest group, the way they think, perceive and process information is often thought of as “normal”.



If someone is **neurodivergent** it means that they process information differently from most other people - perhaps by being dyslexic, autistic or having ADHD.



Neurodiversity is the fact that people process information differently to one another, and that people learn in a variety of ways.



A group of people who think and process information differently to one another could be described as **neurodiverse**. A single person cannot be neurodiverse on their own.



The **NE**urodivergent peer **S**upport **T**oolkit (**NEST**)



This toolkit is designed to help mainstream secondary schools establish a peer support group for neurodivergent young people.

This toolkit has been created by researchers at the University of Edinburgh, neurodivergent young people and a neurodiverse group of adults who work with neurodivergent young people.

What is NEST?

The NEST resources include a handbook and resource pack which help mainstream secondary schools set up **peer support groups for neurodivergent students**.

We'll refer to these as **NEST groups**.

NEST groups provide opportunities for neurodivergent pupils to build connection and community, engage in their choice of activities, and explore their neurodivergent identity.



Why did we develop NEST?

- Approximately 16% of students in Scottish schools are neurodivergent [1].
- 95% are educated within mainstream classes [1].
- Many experience difficulties with peer relationships, bullying, and feeling a sense of belonging at school [2].
- **Peer support** interventions often pair neurodivergent students with neurotypical students, aiming to help them develop 'neurotypical social skills', rather than enabling neurodivergent young people to develop a positive sense of identity and thrive on their own terms [2].



Why did we develop NEST?

- Autistic school-leavers have said that that they would have liked a space to share with like-minded people during their school years [3].
- They also said that peer support groups for all neurodivergent people (not just autistic people) could create a more inclusive environment, give them opportunities to share similar experiences, and help them build a sense of community [3].



Rose Bangs (she/her), Educational Psychologist & Adult co-design team member



How did we develop NEST?

- NEST was **co-designed** with 8 neurodivergent young people and a neurodiverse group of 9 adults who work with neurodivergent young people.
- Each group met six times to discuss neurodivergence and peer support and to establish key principles which should be covered in the NEST handbook.

Join Now
And receive up to £150 in vouchers

Who: 13-16 year olds
Neurodivergent
Scottish Mainstream school
Speak and understand English

What: 6 meetings to create peer support information package

When: Summer 2022

Where: Zoom or MS Teams

For more info contact:
Dr Francesca Fotheringham
Francesca.fotheringham@ed.ac.uk

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Infogram



Co-designing a neurodivergent student-led peer support programme for neurodivergent young people in mainstream high schools

<https://doi.org/10.1177/27546330231205770>



Rose Bangs (she/her), Educational Psychologist & Adult co-design team member



How did we develop NEST?



Harriet Axbey, Autistic Postgraduate student in neurodiversity & Adult co-design team member



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Introducing the NEST resources

1. The NEST handbook
2. The NEST resource pack

Both are **freely available** to download and use in mainstream secondary schools.

<https://salvesen-research.ed.ac.uk/research/nest-neurodivergent-peer-support-toolkit>

Talking about neurodiversity

Some of the words used to talk about neurodiversity can sound very similar to each other and may be new to a lot of people. Below you can see a simple illustration which helps explain some of these new terms. You can find an A4 version of this illustration in the *Resource Pack* (downloadable from our website), which you might find useful to print off and display in school, or discuss with other staff members and/or the **NEST** group, if you decide to set one up.

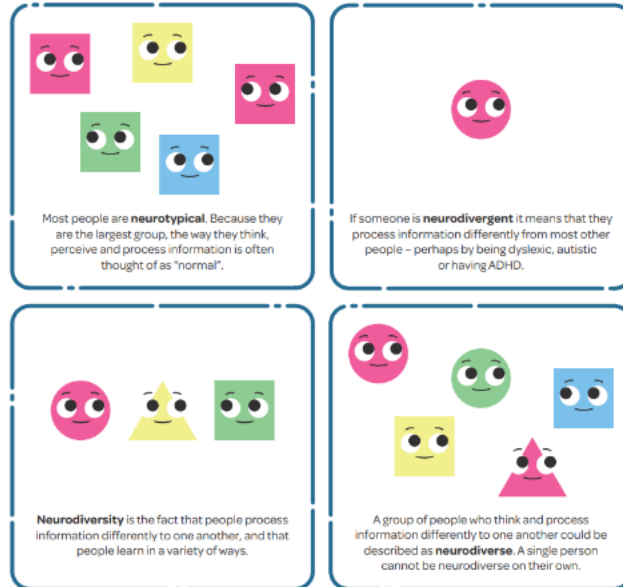
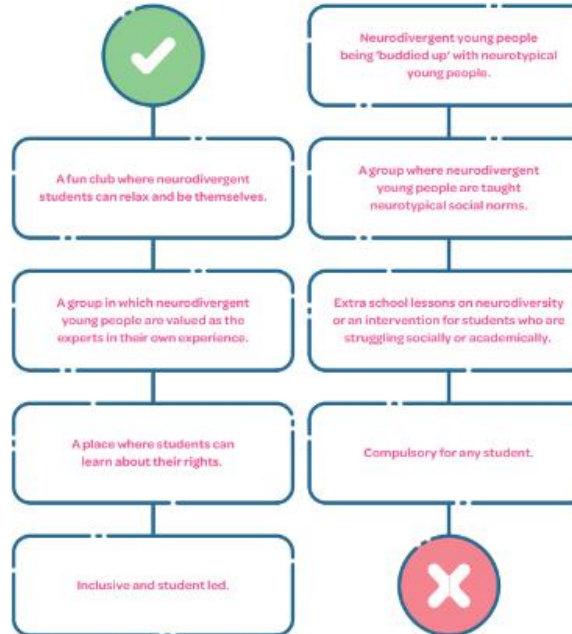


Figure 1: Developed from the work of Sonny Hallett: (@Scrappapertiger / <https://medium.com/@sonnyhallett>)

1(f) What a NEST group is (and what it isn't)



The purpose of the NEST group is for neurodivergent young people to support one another in a safe, accepting, and inclusive environment which acknowledges them as the experts of their own experience.



Section 1

- Information about neurodiversity, neurodivergence, and peer-support.
- Information about the NEST ethos and guiding principles.
- Information to guide you through the handbook.

Stop and think...

Section 2

Section 2:

Is a NEST group right for your school?

For a **NEST** group to be successful, it is important that certain criteria are met. This section will help you reflect on whether your school can currently offer the appropriate:

Space

Culture

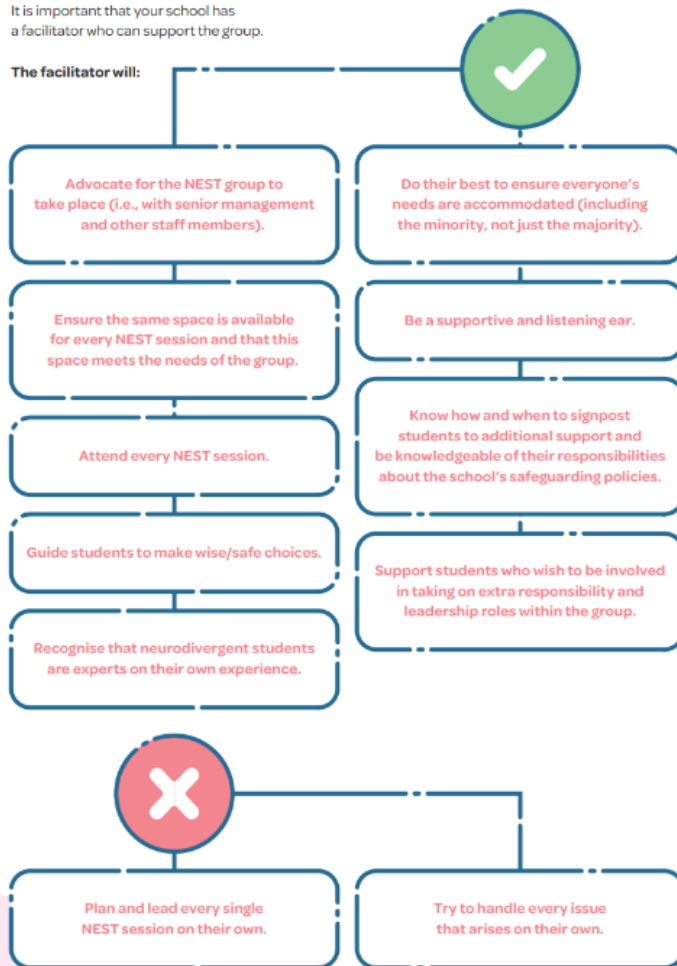
Facilitator

2

2(c) Facilitator

It is important that your school has a facilitator who can support the group.

The facilitator will:



2

Section 2

- Reflective guides to help you decide if NEST is right for your school and who would make a good facilitator.
- Support for getting input from your students.

3

3(b) Setting up the NEST group

It is important that the group is student-led. However, certain considerations should be made by the facilitator in the early stages of setting up the group.

For example, we know that the facilitator will want to make sure that everyone's needs are met. However, careful consideration should be made to ensure that accommodations are not just for the majority, but also for the minority. There may also be cases where two students' needs directly conflict with each other. This means honest conversations about needs will probably go further than promising or attempting perfection. Students' expectations should also be managed regarding the types of accommodations which are feasible to implement.

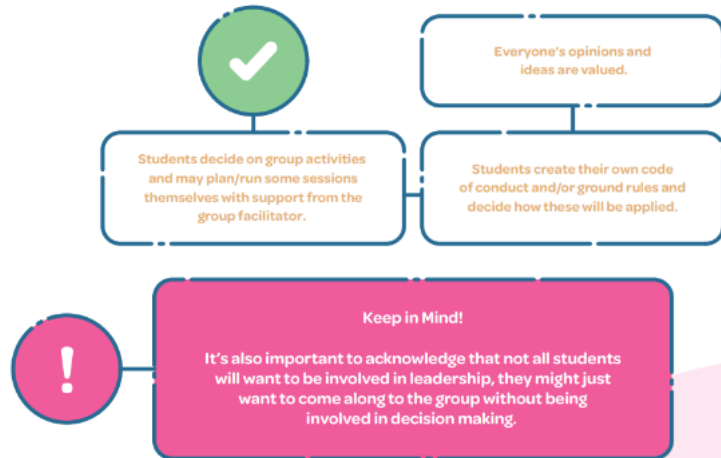
It is also vitally important that the facilitator is experienced in helping the students to stay safe. If there is a student you feel is at risk of bullying, then you must ensure that the appropriate procedures are put in place to safeguard them from the outset.

Student-leadership



It is important that **NEST** groups are student-led. This means that students should have a say in important decisions, including the time and location of the group, ground rules and codes of conduct for members, and the types of activities that take place.

In the first meeting we suggest explaining to group members what student leadership is. For example:



28

NEST group Facilitators in other schools said:

"What I didn't do... was the full advertising, to everyone in the school... because I knew there would be certain dynamics between certain students that I already knew about...and I thought if they were all in one little space together it just wouldn't be a benefit. So, I did kind of seek out people initially."

"I went round all the... registration groups...and did the presentation to all the kids, which was useful to explain what neurodiversity is because I think a lot of them equate it with just Autism. And posters...I got teachers to put those in all the other classrooms as well."

"I spoke to the pe..."

Section 3

- Information about setting up your NEST group.
- Information about advertising and choosing students to join the group.
- Reflections from previous NEST group facilitators.

Some other topics to discuss with the group when formulating your guidelines should be:

4

What you want to call the group and how you will decide this (see the section on Naming your group).

That all different listening styles are welcome.

How to be respectful of everyone's needs and opinions.

That people are welcome to bring sensory tools such as a weighted blanket, fidget toys, or headphones.

How to respectfully communicate with other members in the group. This could include how to respectfully invite people to join an activity as well as how to respectfully decline joining in an activity.

The expectations of the group; what you want to do and/or achieve (remember this group should be a fun activity, rather than an extra lesson).

That it is not compulsory to attend every week, but that students can attend whenever they like.

Under what circumstances neurotypical allies might be invited to attend group sessions.

Who the students can turn to if they're having any difficulties or if there's anything they do not like about the group. This can be the group facilitator but may also be a Support Leader or guidance teacher.

The group may wish to create posters or a leaflet for new members which explain the guidelines. They may also wish to display the guidelines in the room where they meet.

The importance of confidentiality, why it's important to respect other group members' privacy and not to share personal stories or information about someone else outside of the group unless that person has explicitly said that it's ok to do so.

35

Section 4

School Case Study

One school had a large turn out of students and decided to split the group into a 'quiet day' and a 'loud day'. This was so students who needed a quiet space didn't get overstimulated by those who needed noise, and those who needed noise didn't feel overstimulated by trying to be quiet.

- Case studies, quotes, and ideas from previous NEST groups.
- Sample activity plan.
- Information about working with allies.
- Risk assessment and wellbeing considerations.

5

Section 5: FAQs

Below are answers to some questions you might still have about **NEST** groups after having read the handbook. You can also find some more general FAQs on our website:

FAQs

– Do I have to pay to download the NEST handbook or resource pack?

No - the NEST handbook and resource pack are free to download and use.

– Is NEST suitable for mainstream Secondary schools outside of Scotland?

Yes - NEST was designed in the context of the Scotland's education system and piloted in Scottish mainstream Secondary schools. This means that some of the content and resources relate specifically to the Scottish context. However, as NEST is not designed to be part of the curriculum, it is possible for this handbook to be used to set up NEST groups in other countries.

+ Is NEST suitable for use in primary schools or other contexts?

+ Do I need to do any additional training to set up a NEST group?

+ Can I translate the NEST handbook and resource pack?

+ Have you evaluated NEST to see if it works?

+ I'm a parent/carer, can I use NEST?

Section 5

- FAQs.
- Signposting to relevant sections of the handbook.
- Information about the NEST team, other contributors, funders, and Terms of Use.



Recommendations for board games and role-playing games (RPGs)


These games were suggested and recommended by the co-designers of the NEST handbook – young neurodivergent people and the adults who support them (some of whom are neurodivergent, too!)

Board Game Title	Number of Players	Age	Average length of time playing	Average cost (in 2023)
Strategy				
Carcassonne	2-5	7+	30-45 minutes	£30
Ticket to Ride	2-5	8+	30-60 minutes	£25
Takenoko (see also resource management)	2-4	8+	45 minutes	£35
Terra Mystica	2-5	12+	1-2.5 hours	£60
Great Western Trail (see also resource management)	1-4	12+	1-2.5 hours	£40

Spirit Island
Deus
Imperial Settlers
Citadels
7 Wonders
Lords of Waterdeep
Resource Management
Takenoko (see also strategy)
Great Western Trail (see also strategy)
Splendor
Cooperative
Betrayer at the House
Zombicide
Zombie Kids
The Mind
Sentinels of the Multiverse
Social Intrigue/Hiding
Dead of Winter
The Werewolves of Millerville
Lords of Waterdeep



Planned Session Outlines – Topic 1: Fun

Flag/Logo				
Description	Preparation	Risk Assessment & Wellbeing Considerations	Resources Required	Notes
<p>Students may decide that they would like to design a flag or logo for the NEST group. They might decide to design it altogether, or each group member could design their own flag/logo for the group to vote on.</p>  <p>The way this activity is designed should be decided by the group.</p>	<p>Prior to the flag/logo-making session, ask students how they would like to create the flag/logo (e.g., design one as a whole group, or make individual designs and vote on their favourite).</p> <p>Gather any craft and art supplies for the session where the students are creating their designs. You could suggest students bring in their own materials, if they'd like (e.g., for collage).</p> <p>Be aware that you may require a third session to discuss and finalise the designs, or to allow for people to think about and vote on the one that they like the most.</p>	<p>During this session there may be differing opinions, which may cause heightened emotions.</p> <p>It should be explicitly stated that if designs/design ideas are not selected that doesn't mean they weren't good suggestions. You might want to discuss good uses for the flags/logos that aren't selected with group members in advance.</p>	<p>Any craft or art materials required for designing a logo/flag will need to be gathered in advance. These could include paper and pens, or could be more extravagant if the budget allows. You could suggest students bring in their own materials, if they'd like (e.g., for collage).</p>	<p>This activity may be best carried out when the group is just being set up. You might want to incorporate it into the session where you decide on the group's ground rules.</p>
Reflection on the session:				

Resource Pack

The NEST resource pack contains 10 different supporting materials, including:

- **Templates** for advertising NEST groups
Information posters, Instagram/Facebook posts etc.
- **Information** about how NEST links to curriculum and policy.
- **Resources** to help you talk about neurodiversity in school.
- **Resources** to support NEST activities
Book & film lists, board game recommendations.



Our NEST feasibility study

Between Oct 2022 and June 2023, four mainstream secondary schools in Scotland ran a neurodivergent peer support programme using the NEST resources.

Afterwards, we held focus groups with 24 students (11–17-years old) and interviews with 5 school staff.





Neurodivergent-Designed and Neurodivergent-Led Peer Support in School: A feasibility and acceptability study of the NEurodivergent peer Support Toolkit (NEST)

<https://osf.io/preprints/osf/6eayd>



Our NEST feasibility study

What the Neurodiversity Alliance Peer Support (NAPS) Group **is** and **is not**

It is... 	It is not... 
...a fun club!	...an extra school lessons on neurodiversity
...a group in which you are valued as the experts on your experience.	...trying to teach neurodivergent young people neurotypical social norms.
...a place for you to relax and be yourself.	...neurotypical young people being 'buddied' with neurodivergent young people.
... inclusive and student led.	...compulsory for any student.

Activities of N.A.P.S. (Neurodiversity Alliance Peer Support)

Week 1 to week 31

The **group** controls what the **group** does.

N.A.P.S.

N.A.P.S.

Neurodivergent Peer Support Group

Ground Rules

- Respect each person's boundaries
- No yelling
- Wait your turn
- Listen to each other
- No kicking
- No hitting in general
- Keeps hands and feet to yourself
- Respect people's preferred pronouns and preferred names
- Respect people's touch boundaries
- Be open to people who communicate non-verbally
- Confidentiality must be maintained within the group.

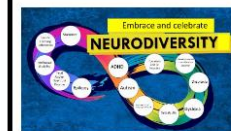
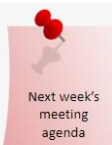
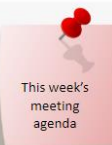


N.A.P.S. Notice Board

Neurodivergent Peer Support Group

Aims of N.A.P.S.

- Embrace and affirm differences
- Understand what we have because of neurodiversity
- Celebrate diversity in the classroom
- Build community and a sense of belonging
- Cultivate self-advocacy and empowerment.



Meet every Tuesday 4pm, after school. Eating & drinking okay.

Materials designed by one of our NEST pilot schools



Our NEST feasibility study

- Staff facilitators said that the handbook was generally **very helpful** in setting up NEST groups, and in prompting staff and students to generate their own ideas.
- The handbook **encouraged** facilitators to support students to lead the group, advertise it to others, take on different roles and responsibilities, and plan and structure activities.

Staff discussed benefits of NEST for their students.

“The juniors meeting the seniors has been the biggest benefit. I think the seniors enjoy the feeling of being a mentor...and the younger ones...when they come from the primary school...into such a big school...seeing the visible success of two seniors...how they are coping with it all and thinking ‘that is going to be me in a couple of years’, they were great role models to them.”

- Staff discussed how they used their expertise and knowledge of the students to address aspects such as students’ conflicting needs and ensuring support for a student-led approach.



Our NEST feasibility study

1. Students said NEST activities were **fun** and provided opportunities to socialise and talk about their special/specific interests in a way that was **framed positively**.

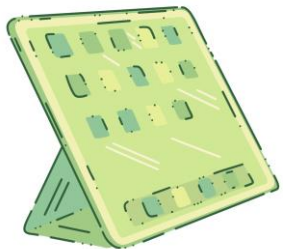
"I can socialise for a change. I don't usually talk to people much and I talk to people here so that is fun."

2. Students also **discussed and reflected** on neurodivergence and neurodiversity.

"[NEST] gave you a sort of wider view on how not everybody is the same. Everyone is different and you get to understand that on a deeper level in a way."

3. NEST groups were **a safe, comfortable space** within school.

"It's quiet, there is not much people, it's a really nice open space."



<https://salvesen-research.ed.ac.uk/research/nest-neurodivergent-peer-support-toolkit>



Our NEST feasibility study

4. NEST groups facilitated the establishment of **friendships** between students and helped **reduce feelings of loneliness**.

"I have found people similar to me and I don't feel alone."

5. Some older students used NEST groups to **mentor younger students**.

"For me it is kind of fulfilment ... I am influencing younger people in a good way ...I am trying to prevent letting people grow negatively."

6. Students benefitted from **building relationships** with the facilitator.

"I feel like it is just better with these two [staff members] because they have a better understanding of neurodiversity than any of the other teachers."



<https://salvesen-research.ed.ac.uk/research/nest-neurodivergent-peer-support-toolkit>



Summary

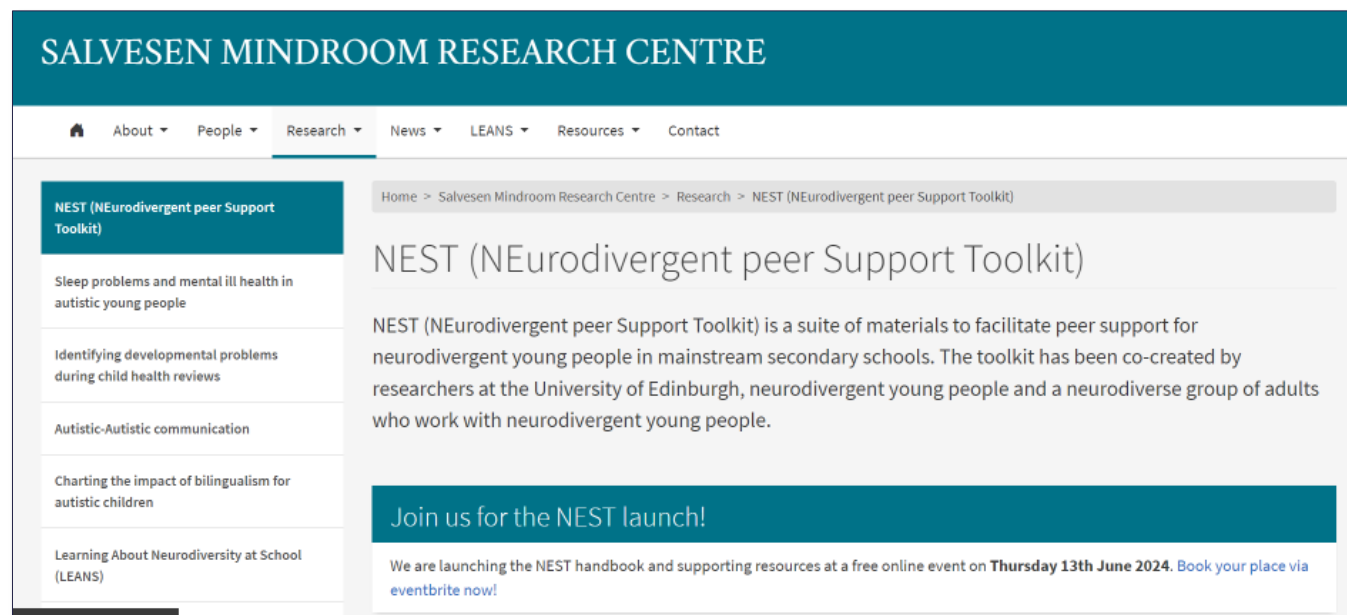
NEST groups can...

- Be a **safe space** for neurodivergent students to have fun with their peers.
- Give neurodivergent students opportunities to engage in **their choice** of activities.
- **Build relationships** based on mutual understanding and experience.
- Help neurodivergent students **learn about neurodiversity** and **explore feelings** related to their own neurodivergence.
- Provide opportunities for the **whole school** to learn more about neurodivergence and for neurodivergent students to be **involved in decision making**.



Next steps for schools

Download the NEST handbook and resources from our website for free!



<https://salvesen-research.ed.ac.uk/research/nest-neurodivergent-peer-support-toolkit>



Rose Bangs (she/her), Educational Psychologist & Adult co-design team member



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Q&A

Please note that the Q&A function may not be anonymous.

Remember to respect confidentiality – if you're sharing experiences, please don't share personal information without permission.

<https://salvesen-research.ed.ac.uk/research/nest-neurodivergent-peer-support-toolkit>



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For more information and to download NEST:
<https://salvesen-research.ed.ac.uk/about-nest>

<https://salvesen-research.ed.ac.uk/research/nest-neurodivergent-peer-support-toolkit>



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- [1] Maciver, D., Rutherford, M., Johnston, L., & Roy, A. S. (2023). Prevalence of neurodevelopmental differences and autism in Scottish primary schools 2018–2022. *Autism Research*, 16(12), 2403–2414. <https://doi.org/10.1002/aur.3063>
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- [3] Crompton C. J., Hallett S., Axbey H., McAuliffe C., Cebula K. (2023). 'Someone like-minded in a big place': Autistic young adults' attitudes towards autistic peer support in mainstream education. *Autism*, 27(1), 76–91. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613221081189>