

Nonlinear Exploratory Protocol: ROYGBIV

A Flexible, Neurodivergent-Affirming Approach to Social-Emotional Learning

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About This Protocol

This protocol is designed for learners who thrive with **autonomy, pattern recognition, multi-sensory engagement, and non-sequential exploration**. It honors neurodivergent ways of thinking and learning while building social-emotional competencies through the ROYGBIV framework.

Who This Is For

- Neurodivergent adults (ADHD, autism, dyslexia, etc.)
- Self-directed learners
- Creative professionals
- Anyone who prefers flexible, exploratory learning
- Individuals who find traditional structured programs restrictive

Core Principles

Autonomy: You choose what to explore, when, and how

Flexibility: No fixed timeline or required order

Authenticity: Honor your natural learning style and needs

Strength-Based: Build on what already works for you

Pattern-Oriented: Make connections in ways that make sense to you

The ROYGBIV Framework

ROYGBIV represents seven core social-emotional competencies, each associated with a color:

- **Red:** Self-Awareness & Mindfulness
 - **Orange:** Creativity & Innovation
 - **Yellow:** Resilience & Perseverance
 - **Green:** Self-Compassion & Empathy
 - **Blue:** Communication & Advocacy
 - **Indigo:** Community Building
 - **Violet:** Diversity & Collaboration
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How to Use This Protocol

1. Start Anywhere

Unlike traditional programs, you don't need to start with Red and work through to Violet. Choose your entry point based on:

- **Personal curiosity:** What interests you most right now?
- **Current life challenges:** What would help you most today?
- **Strengths or weaknesses:** Start where you're strongest or where you need most support

- **Color preference:** Which color resonates with you?
- **Intuitive draw:** What feels right?

2. Explore at Your Own Pace

There is no timeline. You might:

- Spend weeks on one competency
- Sample multiple competencies in a day
- Return to competencies multiple times
- Skip competencies that don't resonate
- Create your own exploration path

3. Choose Your Activities

Each competency offers multiple activity options. Pick what appeals to you, what fits your energy level, and what matches your learning style. You don't need to do everything.

4. Make Connections

Notice how competencies relate to each other. Create your own web of understanding. There's no "correct" pattern—your connections are valid.

5. Reassess When Ready

Take the ROYGBIV assessment whenever it feels right. Focus on patterns and growth over time, not scores. Celebrate non-linear progress.

Phase 1: Immersive Introduction (Self-Paced)

Objective

Explore the framework through multiple entry points simultaneously

Multi-Modal Framework Exposure

Experience ROYGBIV through different senses and formats:

Visual

- Color wheel poster or infographic
- Mind map showing all seven competencies
- Personal artistic interpretation

Kinesthetic

- Physical color cards you can arrange and rearrange
- Movement associated with each color
- Tactile materials in rainbow colors

Auditory

- Framework overview podcast or video
- Music associated with each competency
- Verbal storytelling about the framework

Creative

- Draw or paint your interpretation of ROYGBIV
- Create a collage representing the competencies
- Write a poem or story about the colors

Start with what resonates: Choose any color that draws your attention first.

Self-Discovery Assessment

When you' re ready (no time pressure):

- Take the ROYGBIV assessment
- Skip questions and return later if needed
- Focus on patterns and connections, not scores
- Review results in visual format (color wheel chart)

- Notice which competencies stand out

Remember: There's no "correct" order for reviewing results. Explore what interests you.

Interest-Based Entry

Choose which competency to explore first based on:

- **Personal curiosity:** What do you want to know more about?
 - **Current life challenges:** What would be most helpful right now?
 - **Strongest area:** Want to build on existing strengths?
 - **Weakest area:** Want to address a growth area?
 - **Color preference:** Which color do you love?
 - **Intuitive draw:** What feels right in your gut?
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Phase 2: Constellation Learning (Flexible Timeline)

Objective

Explore competencies in any order, making connections between them

Each module below can be explored independently, in any order, and revisited as many times as needed. Choose 2-5 activities from each module that interest you.

Red Module: Self-Awareness & Mindfulness

Core Concept

Understanding your emotions, thoughts, and bodily sensations. Being present in the moment in ways that work for your brain.

Activity Menu (Choose Your Path)

Emotion Color-Coding Throughout the Day

- Assign colors to different emotions
- Track emotional patterns visually
- Notice triggers and transitions
- Create a personal emotion color wheel

Body Mapping: Where Do You Feel Emotions?

- Draw outline of your body
- Mark where you feel different emotions physically
- Notice patterns (anxiety in chest, excitement in hands, etc.)
- Use this map for early emotion detection

Mindfulness Through Special Interests

- Use hyperfocus as mindfulness practice
- Engage deeply with special interest activities
- Notice the quality of attention during special interests
- Apply that attention quality to other areas

Sensory Awareness Walks

- Walk and notice sensory input (sights, sounds, textures)
- No goal except noticing
- Accommodate sensory sensitivities
- Can be done indoors or outdoors

Stream-of-Consciousness Journaling

- Write without editing or structure
- Let thoughts flow onto paper
- No grammar or spelling rules
- Notice patterns over time

Meditation Alternatives

- Movement meditation (walking, dancing, stimming)
- Music-based meditation
- Art as meditation
- Special interest deep-dive as meditation

Hyperfocus Integration

Your ability to hyperfocus is a strength. Use special interests as mindfulness anchors. The deep attention you bring to interests can be applied to self-awareness.

Stimming Acceptance

Recognize that stimming is a self-regulation strategy you already use. Self-awareness includes noticing when and why you stim, and honoring those needs.

Orange Module: Creativity & Innovation

Core Concept

Generating new ideas, thinking divergently, and approaching problems from unique angles. Neurodivergent thinking is inherently creative.

Activity Menu

Divergent Thinking Games

- “How many uses for a paperclip?” exercises
- Random word association
- Opposite thinking (flip assumptions)
- “What if?” scenarios

Pattern Recognition Challenges

- Find patterns in unexpected places

- Cross-domain pattern mapping
- Visual pattern puzzles
- Pattern breaking exercises

“What If?” Scenario Building

- Imagine alternative realities
- Explore consequences of changes
- Build elaborate hypothetical worlds
- Use special interests as scenario foundations

Invention/Design Projects

- Design solutions to personal problems
- Create tools that work for your brain
- Prototype accommodations you wish existed
- Share innovations with others

Cross-Domain Connection Mapping

- Map connections between different interests
- Find unexpected relationships
- Create visual webs of ideas
- Apply concepts from one domain to another

Alternative Uses Exercises

- Reimagine everyday objects
- Find unconventional applications
- Challenge “normal” usage
- Document creative solutions

Neurodivergent Strength

Your unique perspective-taking is an asset. The way you see connections others miss is innovation. Different thinking drives creativity.

Hyperfocus Power

Channel intense interests into creative output. Deep dives produce novel insights. Your ability to sustain attention on interesting topics generates innovation.

Yellow Module: Resilience & Perseverance

Core Concept

Bouncing back from challenges, adapting to obstacles, and persisting toward goals. Resilience looks different for neurodivergent people—it includes accommodations, not just “pushing through.”

Activity Menu

Reframe Past Challenges as Evidence of Resilience

- List challenges you’ve overcome
- Recognize adaptive strategies you developed
- Celebrate unconventional solutions
- Notice your resilience patterns

Special Interest Deep-Dive Documentation

- Document your learning journey in a special interest
- Notice how you persist through difficulty when interested
- Apply that persistence pattern elsewhere
- Celebrate depth of knowledge achieved

“Failure Resume” Celebrating Learning

- List “failures” and what you learned
- Reframe setbacks as data
- Notice growth from challenges
- Release shame around non-linear paths

Adaptive Strategy Collection

- Document accommodations that work for you
- Share strategies with others
- Build a personal toolkit
- Normalize adaptation as strength

Energy Management Planning

- Track energy patterns throughout day/week/month
- Plan activities around energy availability
- Build in recovery time
- Honor rest as resilience strategy

Masking/Unmasking Reflection

- Notice when and why you mask
- Explore costs of masking
- Identify safe unmasking spaces
- Build resilience through authenticity

Neurodivergent Reframe

Resilience isn't just "pushing through." It's finding different paths, using accommodations, asking for help, and honoring your needs. Adaptation is strength.

Accommodation as Strength

Using tools, strategies, and supports isn't weakness—it's problem-solving. Your ability to identify and implement accommodations demonstrates resilience.

Green Module: Self-Compassion & Empathy

Core Concept

Treating yourself with kindness, especially regarding neurodivergent traits. Understanding others' perspectives while honoring that empathy can look different.

Activity Menu

Self-Compassion for Neurodivergent Traits

- List traits you've been taught to see as "deficits"
- Reframe each as neutral or positive
- Practice self-kindness around struggles
- Challenge internalized ableism

Empathy Through Pattern Recognition

- Notice emotional patterns in others
- Use pattern recognition for empathy
- Recognize that cognitive empathy is valid
- Honor your empathy style

Affective vs. Cognitive Empathy Exploration

- Learn the difference between types of empathy
- Identify your empathy strengths
- Notice when you use each type
- Challenge myths about neurodivergent empathy

Self-Advocacy as Self-Compassion

- Practice asking for what you need
- Frame accommodations as self-care
- Set boundaries around energy and sensory needs
- Recognize advocacy as compassion

Sensory Self-Care Menu

- List sensory inputs that soothe you
- Create sensory comfort toolkit
- Plan sensory breaks into your day
- Honor sensory needs without shame

Boundary-Setting Practice

- Identify where you need boundaries
- Practice saying no
- Communicate limits clearly
- Protect your energy

Neurodivergent Lens

Different empathy expression is valid. You may not show empathy in expected ways, but that doesn't mean you lack it. Cognitive empathy, pattern-based empathy, and delayed empathy processing are all real.

Unmasking Practice

Self-compassion includes allowing yourself to be authentic. Practice unmasking in safe spaces. Treat your authentic self with kindness.

Blue Module: Communication & Advocacy

Core Concept

Expressing yourself clearly, listening actively, and advocating for your needs. Honoring direct, literal, and detailed communication styles.

Activity Menu

Communication Style Inventory

- Identify your natural communication style
- Notice when you adapt your style (masking)
- Recognize strengths of your style
- Find others who communicate similarly

Scripting and Planning Tools

- Create scripts for common situations
- Plan difficult conversations in advance
- Build a library of useful phrases
- Reduce cognitive load through preparation

Direct Communication Practice

- Practice saying exactly what you mean
- Challenge indirect communication norms
- Appreciate clarity over politeness
- Find contexts that value directness

Self-Advocacy Scenarios

- Role-play asking for accommodations
- Practice disclosing neurodivergence (if desired)
- Request sensory or communication needs
- Advocate for yourself in various settings

Alternative Communication Exploration

- Try written vs. verbal communication
- Use visual supports (diagrams, charts)
- Explore AAC tools if helpful
- Find communication methods that work for you

Info-Dumping as Knowledge-Sharing

- Reframe “info-dumping” as enthusiasm

- Find audiences who appreciate depth
- Share special interest knowledge
- Recognize teaching as communication

Neurodivergent Communication

Direct, literal, detailed communication is valid. You don't need to adopt neurotypical communication styles to be effective. Find people and contexts that appreciate your style.

Accommodation Requests

Practice asking for what you need: extra processing time, written instructions, sensory accommodations, communication preferences. Advocacy is a communication skill.

Indigo Module: Community Building

Core Concept

Creating meaningful connections and belonging. Recognizing that neurodivergent connection can look different—parallel play, online communities, and special interest groups are valid.

Activity Menu

Find Affinity-Based Communities

- Seek communities around special interests
- Join neurodivergent spaces
- Connect with people who share your values
- Online and in-person both count

Online vs. In-Person Connection Exploration

- Notice which contexts feel comfortable

- Honor preference for online connection
- Recognize text-based relationships as real
- Balance based on your needs

Parallel Play as Valid Connection

- Spend time with others while doing separate activities
- Recognize this as legitimate socializing
- Find others who appreciate parallel play
- Notice connection without constant interaction

Special Interest Communities

- Join groups focused on your interests
- Deep connection through shared passion
- Info-sharing as bonding
- Find your people through interests

Small Group vs. Large Group Preferences

- Notice your comfort in different group sizes
- Honor preference for one-on-one or small groups
- Avoid forcing yourself into large social settings
- Build community at your scale

Energy-Sustainable Socializing

- Track social energy expenditure
- Plan recovery time after socializing
- Set time limits on social activities
- Choose quality over quantity

Neurodivergent Community

Quality over quantity. A few deep connections matter more than many shallow ones. Online friendships are real. Parallel play is connection. Special interest communities

are your people.

Alternative Connection

Non-traditional relationship building is valid. You don't need to socialize in neurotypical ways to have meaningful community. Find what works for you.

Violet Module: Diversity & Collaboration

Core Concept

Appreciating differences, working with others, and contributing unique perspectives. Neurodivergent thinking enhances diversity and enriches collaboration.

Activity Menu

Neurodiversity Education and Advocacy

- Learn about neurodiversity paradigm
- Share neurodiversity perspective with others
- Advocate for inclusive practices
- Challenge deficit-based narratives

Collaboration Style Assessment

- Identify how you work best with others
- Notice your collaboration strengths
- Communicate your collaboration needs
- Find compatible collaboration partners

Strength-Based Team Contributions

- Identify what you uniquely bring to groups
- Offer your specific skills and perspectives
- Recognize pattern recognition, detail focus, etc. as assets

- Frame neurodivergent traits as contributions

Different Thinking as Diversity Asset

- Recognize your perspective as valuable
- Notice when you see things others miss
- Share alternative viewpoints
- Appreciate cognitive diversity

Accommodation in Group Settings

- Request what you need to participate fully
- Communicate sensory or processing needs
- Suggest alternative collaboration methods
- Model asking for accommodations

Cross-Neurotype Understanding

- Learn about different neurotypes
- Practice perspective-taking across neurotypes
- Build bridges between different thinkers
- Appreciate all forms of diversity

Neurodivergent Contribution

Unique perspectives enhance diversity. Different thinking is an asset to teams. Your way of seeing the world adds value that neurotypical thinking cannot provide.

Collaboration Flexibility

There are multiple ways to contribute to group work. You don't need to collaborate in traditional ways to add value. Asynchronous work, written contributions, and specialized roles are all valid.

Phase 3: Pattern Integration (Ongoing)

Objective

Connect competencies in personally meaningful ways

Web Building

Create Visual Map of Competency Connections

- Draw connections between colors/competencies
- Notice which competencies support each other for you
- Identify personal patterns across the framework
- Build custom pathways through ROYGBIV

Identify Personal Patterns

- Which competencies come easily?
- Which are most challenging?
- How do they interact?
- What patterns emerge over time?

Notice Supportive Relationships

- Does self-awareness (Red) support self-compassion (Green)?
- Does creativity (Orange) enhance communication (Blue)?
- How do competencies build on each other for you?
- Create your own competency ecosystem

Build Custom Pathways

- Design your personal ROYGBIV journey
- Identify which competencies to revisit
- Create loops and spirals, not linear paths
- Honor your unique learning trajectory

Revisit and Revise Understanding

- Return to competencies with new perspective
- Notice how understanding deepens over time
- Revise your competency map as you grow
- Embrace non-linear, iterative learning

Flexible Reassessment

Take Assessment When It Feels Right

- No required schedule
- When you're curious about growth
- After major life changes
- When you want to reflect

Compare Patterns Over Time

- Look at patterns, not just scores
- Notice shifts in competency balance
- Celebrate growth in unexpected areas
- Release judgment about "progress"

Celebrate Non-Linear Growth

- Growth isn't always upward
- Fluctuations are normal
- Different competencies shine at different times
- Honor your unique growth pattern

Recognize Competencies Fluctuate

- Skills vary with energy, stress, context
- That's okay and expected
- Some days are stronger than others
- Flexibility is part of the framework

Track in Preferred Format

- Visual charts or graphs
- Written reflections
- Audio recordings
- Art or creative expression
- Whatever works for your brain

Personalized Practice

Design SEL Practice That Fits Your Brain

- Build on what already works
- Integrate with existing routines
- Use special interests as vehicles
- Honor your natural rhythms

Accommodate Energy Levels and Executive Function

- Plan for variable energy
- Reduce cognitive load where possible
- Use external supports (reminders, timers, lists)
- Be flexible with yourself

Build in Special Interests and Hyperfocus

- Use interests as motivation
- Apply competencies within interest areas
- Let hyperfocus work for you
- Connect SEL to what you love

Allow for Flexibility and Adaptation

- Change practices as needed
- Try new approaches
- Release what doesn't work

- Evolve your practice over time

No “Perfect” Routine Required

- Consistency isn't daily—it's returning
 - Imperfect practice is still practice
 - Breaks are part of the process
 - Your way is the right way
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Tips for Success

Honor Your Neurodivergent Brain

- **Hyperfocus is a feature, not a bug:** Use it strategically
- **Stimming is self-regulation:** Include it in your practice
- **Special interests are pathways:** Use them to explore competencies
- **Masking is exhausting:** Practice in unmasked spaces when possible
- **Sensory needs are real:** Accommodate them without shame

Embrace Non-Linear Learning

- **Spirals, not lines:** You'll return to competencies multiple times
- **Depth over breadth:** Deep exploration of one area is valuable
- **Connections over sequence:** How competencies relate matters more than order
- **Your pattern is valid:** There's no “correct” path through ROYGBIV

Practice Self-Compassion

- **Progress isn't linear:** Fluctuations are normal
- **Rest is productive:** Recovery is part of growth
- **Accommodations are tools:** Using supports is smart, not weak
- **Your pace is right:** Fast, slow, variable—all valid

Find Your People

- **Affinity spaces:** Seek neurodivergent-affirming communities
- **Special interest groups:** Your people are there
- **Online counts:** Digital connection is real connection
- **Quality over quantity:** A few deep relationships matter most

Adapt This Protocol

- **Make it yours:** Change anything that doesn't work
 - **Add activities:** Create your own exploration methods
 - **Skip sections:** Not everything will resonate
 - **Combine competencies:** Explore multiple colors at once if that fits your brain
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Frequently Asked Questions

Do I have to complete all seven competencies?

No. Explore what's relevant and interesting to you. You can focus on 2-3 competencies or sample all seven. There's no completion requirement.

What if I want to skip around between competencies?

Perfect! That's exactly what this protocol is designed for. Follow your curiosity and needs.

How long should this take?

There's no timeline. Some people explore for weeks, others for months or years. It's ongoing, not a program to finish.

What if traditional mindfulness/meditation doesn't work for me?

That's common for neurodivergent people. Try movement-based practices, special interest immersion, or creative activities as alternatives.

Can I do this protocol with a therapist or coach?

Absolutely. This protocol works well with individualized support. Share it with your therapist/coach and adapt together.

What if I have multiple neurodivergences?

This protocol honors all forms of neurodivergence. Adapt it to your specific needs, whether you're ADHD, autistic, dyslexic, or multiply neurodivergent.

Is it okay to use accommodations and tools?

Yes! Accommodations, tools, and supports are encouraged. They're problem-solving strategies, not crutches.

What if my energy and executive function vary a lot?

Build that variability into your practice. Have high-energy and low-energy activity options. Be flexible with yourself.

Can I combine this with the Linear Protocol?

Yes. Some people use linear structure for certain competencies and nonlinear exploration for others. Hybrid approaches are valid.

Resources for Continued Learning

Books

- *Divergent Mind* by Jenara Nerenberg
- *Unmasking Autism* by Devon Price
- *Self-Compassion* by Kristin Neff
- *The Neurodivergent Friendly Workbook of DBT Skills* by Sonny Jane Wise

Online Communities

- Neurodivergent-affirming social media spaces
- Special interest forums and groups
- Online therapy and coaching platforms
- Peer support communities

Professional Support

- Neurodivergent-affirming therapists

- ADHD/autism coaches
 - Occupational therapists
 - Peer mentors and support groups
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About SEL Academy

SEL Academy provides evidence-based, neuroscience-informed social-emotional learning frameworks designed for diverse learners. We honor neurodivergent ways of thinking and learning while building competencies that support well-being and success.

For more information, resources, and support, visit our website or contact us.

Remember: Your way of learning is valid. Your pace is right. Your path through ROYGBIV is yours to create. There is no “correct” way to build social-emotional competencies—only the way that works for your unique brain.

You are not broken. You are not behind. You are exactly where you need to be.

This protocol was designed with input from neurodivergent educators, therapists, and learners. It reflects lived experience and neurodiversity-affirming values.

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