

Key terms and language

A reference guide for inclusive languages

Language matters. Using the right words shows respect and helps build trust. This glossary explains key terms related to neurodiversity and language that are useful to know.

Key terms

Neurodiversity is a concept that recognises and celebrates the diversity of neurological traits and differences among individuals. It suggests that neurological variations, such as those associated with conditions like autism and ADHD, are natural and valuable aspects of human diversity. The word neurodiverse refers to a group of people with different neurotypes - not an individual.

Neurodivergent describes individuals whose neurological development and functioning differ from the dominant societal standards. It encompasses a range of conditions including autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and others. It is an individual or community identity. Neurodivergent is not the same thing as Autistic or ADHD - if someone means Autistic or ADHD, they should say that.

A **Neurotype** refers to an individual's unique neurological characteristics or profile, encompassing how their brain functions, processes information, and perceives the world.

Neurodiverse refers to a group or setting that includes individuals with a variety of neurological traits and differences. It acknowledges and embraces the diversity of neurotypes within a community, organisation, or environment. A person is not neurodiverse - they have a single brain. A group of different neurotypes is neurodiverse.

Neurominority describes individuals or groups whose neurological traits and functioning deviate from the perceived norm in society. It is used in relation to the concept of neuromajority, which refers to individuals whose neurological characteristics align with the dominant societal standards.

Neurotypical refers to individuals whose neurological development and functioning align with the dominant societal standards. It is often used in contrast to neurodivergent, highlighting those whose cognitive and neurological traits are considered typical or in line with the majority.

Language we use

Avoid	Use instead
Person with autism	Autistic, Autistic person
ASD (autism spectrum disorder), except relating to diagnoses	Autism
Typically developing, normal	Non-autistic
High functioning autism	Low support needs
Low functioning autism	High support needs
Severity levels	Support needs
Intervention	Support
Suffers from	Experiences
Symptoms	Characteristics or traits
Problems or difficulties	Challenges
Disorder	Condition
Co-morbidity	Co-occurring condition
Special interests, obsessions	Interests, hobbies, or passions
Neurological disorder	Neurological difference
Non-verbal	Non-speaking
Selectively mute or selective mutism	Situationally mute
Diagnosed with autism	Identified as Autistic
Challenging, disruptive, or problem behaviour	Meltdowns, self-injurious or aggressive behaviours, or other specific descriptions

A note on language preferences

Most of the neurodivergent community prefer identity-first language - for example, saying someone is Autistic rather than a person with autism. However, in every situation, each person's preference for language is the most important thing. Always listen and follow the lead of the person you are talking to.

When reading employer profiles or job ads, the language an organisation uses tells you something about how they understand and respect the Autistic community. Employers who use respectful, up-to-date language are more likely to have genuinely engaged with neuroinclusion.