




A Summary Guide to Neurodiversity Affirming Language

Word	What it Means	Extra Info...
Neurodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes every neurotype! • Everyone • Neurodiversity acknowledges neurology is a spectrum and that there are natural variations of neurocognitive functioning within our species 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neurodiversity is represented by the rainbow infinity symbol
Neurotypical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Someone whose neurotype allows them to benefit and work within the society they live in. 	
Neurodivergent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Someone whose neurotype diverges from the one that benefits from the society they live in. • Their neurotype does not allow them to benefit and work within their society's expectations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neurodivergence extends beyond being Autistic or an ADHDer • The umbrella of neurodivergence includes all neurotypes which are not neurotypical
Neuroqueer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A verb first, then adjective • To embrace someone's neurodivergence and queer the neuro-normative, CIS gendered, patriarchy. • "You're neuroqueer if you neuroqueer." - Nick Walker 	Coined by Dr. Nick Walker, 2008

Neurodiversity Affirming Language		
Instead of...	Say this...	More Info...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ASD or ASC • Autism Spectrum Disorder or Condition • On the Autism Spectrum • On the Spectrum • Asperger's • Aspie 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autistic <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ As in they are an autistic person • Autistic neurotype • Autism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ As in autism is one of their SPINs or autism is hereditary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unless the individual or family expresses their preference of person first language. If they do, you respect their preferences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-verbal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-speaking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This comes at the request of non-speaking adults
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time blindness • Any other phrase with blindness as a descriptor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time agnosia • Use agnosia in place of the word blindness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This comes at the request of the blind community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defecits or problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differences, neuro-differences, or challenges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I.e., Sensory processing differences • I.e., Challenges with regulation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrow, restricted, repetitive interests or special interests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SPINs, passions, hobbies, interests, intense interests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The autistic community has reclaimed the term 'special interests' and now refers to them as SPINs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenging behaviour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the specific challenges • An increase in specific support needs during dysregulation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I.e., They struggled today with the layers and amount of noise in the shopping centre. This led them to experience dysregulation and they experienced a meltdown.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific support needs 	

Neurodiversity Affirming Language Continued...		
Instead of...	Say this...	More Info...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Symptoms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Characteristics, traits, qualities, neuro-differences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I.e., What characteristics do you have that make you think you might be autistic?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using functioning labels such as high/low or levels 1, 2 or 3 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the individuals strengths, abilities, challenges, and support needs • Variable support needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For many the labels are offensive • Remember the reality of ability is fluctuating for all humans, regardless of neurology
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ADHD • An autistic person who is also an ADHDer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ADHDer • AuDHD or AuDHDer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Pronounced <i>autie-hd</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is less consensus within the ADHD community around identity vs person first language. There is a cohort that still prefer person first language. If they express that, we respect that.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stereotype 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stimming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impt to allow stimming
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Normal • Abnormal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neurotypical • Neurodivergent 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differently abled • Person with a disability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disability • Disabled 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity first language • Its the systems, environment and people's assumptions about disability that disables us. Until those change, we will continue to experience disability.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comorbidities • Comorbid conditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-occurring 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diagnosed with Autism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identified as Autistic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being diagnosed is part of the medical model
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selective Mutism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Situationally non-speaking 	

Neurodiversity Affirming Language Continued...		
Instead of...	Say this...	More Info...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requiring <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Treatment ◦ Intervention ◦ Therapy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requiring <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Support ◦ Accommodations ◦ Neuro-affirming therapies ◦ Understanding ◦ Acceptance 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any implication that neurodivergent brains need fixing, are broken, or less than 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different neurodivergences are different neurotypes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I.e., Autism is a distinct neurotype
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not use the puzzle piece as a symbol to represent Autism •  	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the rainbow infinity symbol to represent the full spectrum of neurodiversity which includes autism •  	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The puzzle piece represents the infantilism that autistic adults experience • It has connections to the idea that there is something wrong and needs to be fixed or figured out in relation to the autistic brain • It has been used historically to represent the final piece, the genetic link to a cure.

***Please note, language is fluid and constantly evolving. This guide was put together in 2024. I will continue to update it as the language around neurodiversity and neuro-affirming language evolves. Updated 19 March 2024*

****This document is informed by a combination of my lived experiences as an AuDHDer, by my professional experience within the Neurodiversity space, and by the references listed below.*

References

- <https://jenniferkemp.com.au/wp/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/resource-navigating-neurodiversity-affirming-language.pdf>
- <https://ndconnection.co.uk/resources/p/nd-affirming-language-guide>
- <https://reframingautism.org.au/neurodiversity-affirming-language-a-letter-to-your-family-friends-and-support-network/>
- <https://neuroqueer.com/neuroqueer-an-introduction/>
- <https://neuroclastic.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Heres-Why-Most-Autistic-People-Hate-the-Puzzle-Piece-Symbol.pdf>