

Neurodiversity Definitions

Introduction

Neurodiversity recognises that people experience and interact with the world around them in many ways, and that there is no single 'right' way of thinking, learning, or behaving. This lexicon provides definitions of commonly used terms relating to neurodiverse conditions. Its purpose is to raise awareness, build understanding, and support the creation of inclusive environments where everyone's strengths and challenges are recognised and valued.

Accommodations

Adjustments, supports, or changes made in the environment, communication, or working/learning practices to ensure equitable access and participation for neurodivergent individuals. Examples include flexible working hours, quiet spaces, or written instructions.

ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder)

A neurodevelopmental condition characterised by inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity, which can affect organisation, focus, and time management.

Allistic

A term used to describe a person who is not autistic. While "neurotypical" refers to people whose brain function, behaviour, and processing align with social norms, allistic specifically excludes autistic people but may still include others who are neurodivergent (e.g., ADHD, dyslexia).

AuDHD

A term used to describe a person who is both autistic and has ADHD. This combination can bring overlapping traits, such as differences in attention, sensory processing, and emotional regulation, alongside unique strengths in creativity, focus, and problem-solving.

Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC)

A lifelong developmental condition affecting communication, social interaction, and behaviour. Often associated with sensory differences, repetitive patterns, and unique strengths.

Characteristics

The ways in which someone's neurodiversity presents or is expressed. For example, one person's characteristics may include difficulty maintaining eye contact or a strong attention to detail. It is important to recognise that characteristics vary widely and do not define an individual's entire experience.

Co-existing Conditions

Refers to when an individual experiences two or more neurodivergent conditions or mental health challenges simultaneously (for example, ADHD and autism, or dyslexia and anxiety). Sometimes called 'co-occurring conditions.'

Dyscalculia

A specific learning difference that affects the ability to understand and work with numbers, including mathematical concepts and calculations.

Dysgraphia

A learning difference that affects writing skills, including spelling, handwriting, and the organisation of ideas on paper.

Dyslexia

A common learning difference that primarily affects reading and spelling, often linked with strengths in creativity and problem-solving.

Dyspraxia (Developmental Coordination Disorder)

A condition that affects motor coordination, movement, and sometimes organisation, memory, and planning.

Intellectual Disability (Learning Disability in UK terminology)

Significant limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviour, impacting conceptual, social, and practical skills.

Masking

The conscious or unconscious act of hiding or suppressing neurodivergent traits in order to fit into neurotypical social expectations. Masking can be emotionally and physically exhausting and may contribute to burnout or mental health challenges.

Neurospicy

A light-hearted, informal term used within the neurodivergent community to describe someone whose brain functions differently from the neurotypical norm. It's often used as a more playful, empowering alternative to 'neurodivergent.'

Neurotypical

Refers to individuals whose neurological development and functioning are considered typical or within societal norms. Neurotypical people do not have a developmental, learning, or cognitive difference such as autism, ADHD, or dyslexia.

Non-Verbal Learning Disability (NVLD)

A condition characterised by strong verbal skills but difficulties with motor coordination, visual-spatial awareness, and social understanding.

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

A condition involving intrusive, unwanted thoughts (obsessions) and repetitive behaviours or rituals (compulsions) carried out to reduce anxiety.

Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA)

Considered a profile within the autism spectrum, PDA is characterised by extreme anxiety and avoidance of everyday demands and expectations.

Sensory Processing Differences

Differences in the way sensory information (such as sound, light, textures, or movement) is experienced and interpreted by the brain.

Spectrum

Describes the wide range of experiences, abilities, and support needs within a neurodivergent condition, particularly autism. It reflects that neurodivergence is not a single point but a continuum of diverse traits and expressions.

Spiky Profile:

A term used to describe uneven skill levels across different areas of ability. A neurodivergent person might have highly developed skills in some areas but find other areas more challenging. This profile reflects that intelligence and capability are not uniform or linear.

Support Needs (Low/High Support Needs)

A respectful way to describe the level or type of assistance an autistic person may require in daily life, communication, or sensory regulation. 'Low support needs' might mean someone requires occasional or situational adjustments. 'High support needs' might mean someone requires significant or consistent assistance in multiple areas of life. This terminology is considered more inclusive and less ableist than 'high/low functioning.'

Tourette's Syndrome

A neurological condition that involves involuntary sounds and movements known as tics.

Please note: Linguistic choices are frequently personal, and nobody should be shamed for adopting a term that isn't fashionable or up to date. It is important to respect personal preferences.