

Embracing the Language of Neurodiversity



A Guide to Inclusive Language and Values

“Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.” **Maya Angelou**



Neurodiversity describes the differences in the way that brains work. There is no ‘correct’ way for the brain to work and instead, there is a wide range of ways that people perceive and respond to the world.

The term ‘*neurodiversity*’ was coined to help fight the stigma faced by neurodivergent individuals. It is a movement (a human rights, social and disability movement) that focuses upon developing individual strengths and recognising that everyone has a unique brain and therefore different needs and abilities.

Language plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions and attitudes towards neurodiversity. This guide is designed to help foster respect and appreciation for neurodivergent individuals. By embracing neuro-affirmative language, we can create an environment that is more inclusive of every brain type.

What does it mean to be neuro-affirmative? Moving away from an approach which talks about deficits or impairments and instead, recognising and respecting evolving neurodivergent culture and identities, supporting needs and challenges and not pathologising neurodivergent ways of being.

As language around neurodiversity continues to evolve, it is important to recognise the dynamic nature of how individuals and communities choose to identify. Establishing how individuals prefer to describe themselves is essential in honouring their identities and lived experiences. This guide emphasises the importance of using language that respects and affirms neurodivergent individuals' self-identification. It acknowledges that terminology may vary among individuals and communities, and encourages open communication to establish preferred language. Additionally, this guide is committed to staying up to date, to reflect neuro-affirming language and values, ensuring inclusivity and respect for all.

Recognise that there is immense value in diversity

There is inherent value in diversity in and of itself. We need all kinds of people and minds in order to flourish as worldwide societies. Being neurodiversity affirmative is to see and celebrate the value of this diversity.

Recognise that there is value in living a disabled life

To see the value in disability and living a disabled life requires examining how our views on disability are inextricably tied to capitalist ideals of being 'productive' and 'independence' (i.e. needing no outside help or support again so that you do not cost the 'system' money). It is a person's right to choose if they identify as disabled and disability is not a "dirty" word. Many disabled people will need ongoing support from others throughout their lives and may never have a paid job, but this does not mean that they do not live a rich, valuable and meaningful life.

Ensure that all neurodivergent people (including those with Significant Learning Disability and High Support Needs) have power, a place at the table, and are supported and advocated for

Being neurodiversity affirmative means that all neurodivergent people, no matter how high their support needs are, or how they communicate, have an equal voice and agency in relation to their own lives and communities. The neurodiversity movement was born out of the wider disability movement and has always (and continues to) encompass, embrace and advocate for the voices of all disabled people.

Language for Inclusive Communities

Use Identity First Language

Identity-first language, such as "autistic person," recognising neurodiversity as an inherent aspect of an individual's identity. The majority of neurodivergent people prefer this approach for its affirming nature, acknowledging the integral connection between their identity and lived experiences.

Respect Individual Language Preferences

Respecting individual preferences is crucial, recognising that most may prefer identity-first language while others favour person-first language. It involves honouring each person's choice regarding how they wish to be described in relation to neurodivergent identity.

We acknowledge that the terms neurodiversity and neurodivergent are framed in ways that hold

both similarities and differences between different theories of knowledge, such as disability studies, critical autism studies, Neuroqueer theory and allow space for understandings that differ from our own.

Reframe from disorder to neurotype

The neurodivergent experience is a valid, different neurotype. We do not need to classify people using a standard of “normality” or “typicality.” The medical model of disability and all classification systems arising from this model (e.g. the DSM-5-TR diagnostic criteria) are inherently based on “neuro-normative” assumptions.

Being Truly Neurodiversity Affirming

Being neurodiversity affirmative does not just mean changing your language to be more respectful of the community, but making systemic changes across workplaces, healthcare systems, communities, and society so that neurodivergent people have the equal rights they deserve. This requires community allies as well as advocates. It is a basic human right to have a voice and a ‘place at the table’ in equal decision-making about community needs, and diversifying teams in this way also leads to better care and support.

Focus on Strengths

Emphasise the strengths and abilities of neurodivergent individuals, celebrating their unique perspectives and contributions to society. Recognising and highlighting strengths fosters a positive narrative around neurodiversity, promoting acceptance and inclusion.

Avoid Overgeneralisation

Recognise the diversity within the neurodiverse community, avoiding assumptions or generalisations based on stereotypes. Asking about and acknowledging individual differences and experiences promotes inclusivity and respect.

Use Inclusive Language

Using inclusive language respects all neurodiverse identities and acknowledges intersectionality with other aspects of identity. Prioritising preferred terminology, avoiding ableist language, and promoting accessibility create a welcoming environment for all.

Listen and Learn

Listening to the experiences and perspectives of neurodivergent individuals broadens understanding and promotes empathy. Learning from their insights fosters meaningful connections and supports inclusive practices.

Avoid Pathologising Language

Avoid framing neurodiversity solely as a disorder or deficit, recognising it as a natural variation of human neurology with both strengths and challenges. Using affirming language promotes acceptance, encourages supports, and celebrates diversity which will bring inclusion.

Reject Compliance or Behaviour Based Approaches

Behaviour-based compliance approaches are fully rejected by the autistic community and the neurodiversity paradigm, in part as they share their origins with gay conversion therapy. Ultimately the end goal of Applied Behaviour Analysis is an autistic child (or adult) who is 'indistinguishable' from their neurotypical peers. Compliance-based behavioural methods (including Positive Behaviour Support or PBS and ABA) have been shown to have significant, negative, long-term effects on people's mental health.

Compliance-based behaviour methods are ineffective, increasingly showing links between masking (promoted by neurotypical social skills training) and poor mental health, self-harm and suicide. These approaches place barriers to connection, prevent full exploration of neurodivergent identity and finding a way to be neurodivergent in the world, instead encouraging concealment of a crucial element of the self, increasing loneliness and isolation. It leads to feelings of rejection, hurt and devaluation.

A process of ever-becoming

Several neurodiversity-affirming psychologists¹, in encouraging fellow clinicians to move towards neuro-affirmative practice, write that *"neuro-affirmative practice is a process of ever-becoming: you will never arrive."* We should always learn from the community, ever exploring our own knowledge. *"Do not make neuronormative or heteronormative assumptions....Strive for cultural humility. Show yourself compassion as you unlearn, re-learn, and ever move forward. Learning is an ever-looping process of becoming, it is not linear. Welcome this."*

Terms & Concepts in Neurodiversity

Ableism: Discrimination in favour of non-disabled people.

Ableist Language: Words or phrases that make people with differences or disabilities feel less valued, and might intentionally or unintentionally reinforce stereotypes or negative perceptions.

¹ <https://www.bps.org.uk/psychologist/what-does-it-mean-be-neurodiversity-affirmative>

Accommodations: actions that help ameliorate a substantial disadvantage due to disability or medical condition. For children in the classroom, this could mean allowing noise-cancelling headphones, providing more opportunities for movement or extra time for test-taking or physical changes to the classroom environment.

ADHD: Is or can be characterised by differences in regulation, executive function, organisation, impulsivity, emotional intensity and can appear differently in females than males, particularly impacted by hormones.

Applied Behavioural Analysis: (ABA) focusses on the function of behaviour and the compliance of the child (achieved through rewards or negative reinforcement) and teaches children to mask their pain and distress leading to poor mental health and increased suicidality. Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) is being widely promoted as another approach to be used on people who are disabled and/or neurodivergent and display behaviours others do not wish to see. Often the disabled person has significant sensory, communication, trauma or medical needs and rights that are not met. PBS is not supported by Disabled People's Organisations and allies. This is because PBS does not meet human rights, has a poor quality evidence base and its risks and harms are not understood.

Alternative Augmentative Communication: (AAC) encompasses all the ways people communicate without talking, using devices, strategies or methods such as signing.

AuDHD: Co-occurrence of autism and ADHD.

Autism: Being Autistic is a different, valid, neurotype with a distinct developmental trajectory. It is a different way of experiencing the world, not a disorder.

Autism Spectrum Disorder: how Autism is referred to in the DSM-5. The DSM-5 is the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Illnesses; the American Psychiatric Association's professional reference book on mental health and brain-related conditions. See preferred language table below; we advocate that this term should not be used in relation to autistic people/autism.

Burnout: A state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion, often experienced by neurodivergent individuals due to the continuous effort to adapt to a world designed for neurotypical individuals.

Co-occurring Conditions: Conditions that may accompany neurodivergence, affecting an individual's experiences and support needs.

Disabled, Disability: These terms acknowledge that societal barriers, not just medical conditions, create challenges for neurodivergent individuals. The definition of disability in Ireland is found in sections 2 and 7 of the Disability Act 2005 as meaning a substantial restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in life, by reason of an enduring physical, sensory, mental

health or intellectual impairment. The restriction must be permanent and resulting in significant difficulty in communication, learning or mobility or in significantly disordered cognitive processes and gives rise to the need for services to be provided to ameliorate the disability.

Disability Justice: a movement that seeks to dismantle systemic oppression against disabled individuals, the main principles of which are:

- Recognising the intersectionality of disability with other forms of marginalisation.
- Leadership of those most individuals who are also part of other marginalised communities.
- Anti-capitalism challenges the notion that human worth is tied to productivity, critiquing systems that prioritise profit over people.
- Interdependence instead of independence, recognising that we all need each other for support.
- Collective liberation advocates for a world where all oppressed people work together towards freedom and protection of human rights, ensuring that no-one is left behind.

Disabled Persons Organisations: are led by and for disabled persons.

Double Empathy Problem: The phrase coined by Damian Milton explaining the misunderstanding that happens between neurodivergent and neurotypical people, as both can struggle to understand each other's feelings and perspectives. The emphasis should be on both people developing an understanding of each other's ways of being and working together on the best ways to interact with each other. There needs to be mutual respect for the diversity of communication between humans.

Dyslexia: is a learning difference that can cause difficulties with reading and writing. Everyone with dyslexia is different but there is a commonality of difficulties with reading, spelling and writing and related cognitive/processing difficulties. Dyslexia is not a general difficulty with learning, it impacts specific skill areas. The impact of dyslexia can change according to the environment (i.e. what a dyslexic person is being asked to do and under what circumstances).

Dyspraxia: affects movement and coordination (organisation of bigger and smaller movements) which can affect the performance of day-to-day activities (at home, in school, during play, at work).

Dysregulation: When stress levels become too much to manage, causing overwhelm.

Gestalt Language Development: a second path of natural language development called 'gestalt language development' — which contrasts with 'analytic language development' that has in the past been labelled as 'typical.' Gestalt language development is common among both neurotypical and neurodivergent children, and has predictable steps just like 'typical' language development. GLD begins with language gestalts (whole phrases, songs, stories, movies); ALD begins with single words.

Inclusion: The practice and goal of creating environments and opportunities that are accessible and welcoming to all individuals, regardless of their abilities or disabilities.

Inclusive Language: Language that is consciously chosen to be respectful and welcoming, avoiding terms that exclude, marginalise, or are harmful or insulting.

Intersectionality: describes the ways in which systems of inequality based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, class and other forms of discrimination “intersect” to create unique dynamics and effects.

Neuro-affirming: Approaches and practices that validate and support the identities and experiences of neurodivergent individuals.

Neuroception is a subconscious process through which your nervous system evaluates safety in your environment. While perception requires conscious awareness and cognitive processing, neuroception functions at a subconscious and instinctual or primitive level. Our brain’s ability to sense and interpret signals from the environment (neuroception) plays a crucial role in regulating our bodily and emotional responses. Neurodivergent individuals, particularly children who are PDA (see below), commonly have hypersensitive neuroception meaning their nervous system is constantly perceiving threats, causing dysregulation and triggering a survival response that can disrupt their ability to eat, toilet, sleep, communicate and impacting their safety.

Neurodivergent: Neurodivergent refers to individuals whose brains work in unique ways. It celebrates the diversity of minds and challenges the idea of a single way of thinking or processing information.

Neurodiversity Paradigm: Viewing neurological differences as natural variations that should be respected and valued, not seen as deficits.

Neurodiverse: A group or environment that includes many different types of minds, both neurotypical and neurodivergent. Often mistakenly used to refer to neurodivergent people.

Neurodiversity: Neurodiversity celebrates the natural variation in how people's brains work, recognising differences in cognition, behaviour, and neurological makeup as valuable aspects of human diversity.

Neurodiversity Movement: a social justice and civil and human rights movement, aiming to celebrate and accept differences, achieving equality, respect and full inclusion for neurodivergent people.

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD): 4 main steps in a cycle of thoughts and behaviours: Obsession; an unwanted and distressing thought, image or urge repeatedly enters your mind. Anxiety; the obsession provokes a feeling of intense anxiety or distress. Compulsion; repetitive behaviours or mental acts that you feel driven to perform. These can be a response to the obsessive thought pattern. Temporary relief; the compulsive behaviour relieves the anxiety for a short while, but it returns.

PDA - Persistent Drive for Autonomy (previously Pathological Demand

Avoidance): A nervous system disability, whereby a survival response is triggered when the person experiences dysregulation, loss of autonomy or equality. Capacity to meet the demands that arise from participation in daily life fluctuates, due to the cumulative impact of loss of autonomy or equality on the nervous system and is supported by identifying, understanding and holistically meeting regulation needs.

Positive Neurodivergent Identity: To have pride in neurodivergent culture, value personal communication style and recognise and increase personal strengths and self-autonomy, including by way of self-advocacy.

Rights Based Model of Disability: The human rights model of disability recognises that disability is a social contract and disabilities must not be taken as a legitimate ground for the denial or restriction of human rights. It acknowledges that disability is one of several layers of identity. Hence disability laws and policies must take the diversity of disabled persons into account. It also recognises that human rights are interdependent, interrelated, and indivisible.

Rights Based Model of Support: A human rights-based approach to care and support seeks to ensure that the human rights of participants are protected, promoted and supported by staff and services. The language used by and attitudes of providers is crucial to implementing this kind of approach. Children's views and voices must be centred at all times, to protect their rights.

Sensory Differences: Variations in how people process sensory information.

Sensory Processing: how the brain takes in and sorts out information from the senses, which are visual, auditory, tactile, gustatory (taste), proprioception (information from the muscles), vestibular (movement) and interoception (how your body feels things internally).

Social Model vs. Medical Model of Disability: The social model recognises societal barriers that create challenges for neurodivergent individuals, such as inaccessible environments and negative attitudes. It aims to remove these barriers for a more inclusive society where neurodivergent individuals can thrive. In contrast, the medical model sees neurodiversity as a problem to be fixed, focusing on treating brain differences rather than addressing societal barriers. This approach may overlook the strengths and unique perspectives neurodivergent individuals bring to society.

Stimming: Self expression body language that helps regulate sensory input or manage emotions, common among neurodivergent individuals.

Tics: are fast, repetitive muscle movements that result in sudden and difficult to control body jolts or sounds.

Tourette's Syndrome: Tics are the main symptom of Tourette's syndrome. They usually appear

in childhood between the ages of 2 and 14 (around 6 years is the average). Tourette's syndrome can involve a combination of physical and vocal tics. Most people with Tourette's syndrome experience a strong urge before a tic, which has been compared to the feeling you get before needing to itch or sneeze. These feelings are known as premonitory sensations. Premonitory sensations are only relieved after the tic has been carried out.

Universal Design: Universal design is the design of environments, systems or practices, to make them accessible to people, regardless of age, disability or other factors. It emerged as a rights-based, anti-discrimination measure, which seeks to create design for all abilities. Universal Design and inclusion are key to achieving the right to education and training as enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the first legally binding instrument to contain a reference to the concept of quality inclusive education.

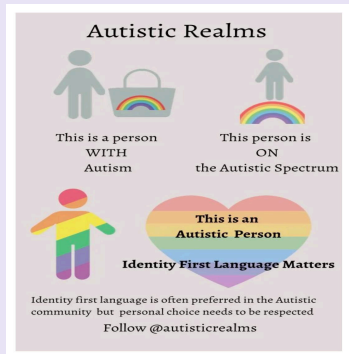
The Disability Act 2005 defines Universal Design, or UD, as: The design and composition of an environment so that it may be accessed, understood and used to the greatest possible extent, in the most independent and natural manner possible in the widest possible range of situations, without the need for adaptation, modification, assistive devices or specialised solutions, by any persons of any age or size or having any particular physical, sensory, mental health or intellectual ability or disability, and means, in relation to electronic systems, any electronics-based process of creating products, services or systems so that they may be used by any person.

UNCRPD: The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) is a UN treaty which affirms and protects the human rights of people with disabilities, signed by Ireland in 2007 ratified by Ireland in March 2018. The Optional Protocol establishes an individual complaints mechanism for the UNCRPD which Ireland ratified at the end of 2024.

The Convention applies established human rights principles from the UN Declaration on Human Rights to the situation of persons with disabilities. It covers civil and political rights to equal treatment and freedom from discrimination, and social and economic rights in areas like education, health care, employment and transport.

Article 7 provides 3 main rights for disabled children:

1. States Parties shall take all necessary measures to ensure the **full enjoyment by children with disabilities of all human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis** with other children.
2. In all actions concerning children with disabilities, the **best interests of the child** shall be a primary consideration.
3. States Parties shall ensure that children with disabilities have the **right to express their views freely on all matters affecting them**, their views being given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity, on an equal basis with other children, and to be provided with disability and age-appropriate assistance to realise that right.

Preferred Language	Language to Avoid	Why is it preferred?
Identity First Language Autistic Individual	Person First Language Person with Autism	Emphasises autism as an integral part of a person's identity. Individuals may prefer to identify with their neurodivergence. Respects the neurotype and avoids framing autism as a disorder or “condition.” However, some neurodivergent people differ in their language preference on identity first language. Acknowledging each individual's preferred language is respectful toward their identity and lived experiences.
Autistic	Has Autism Has Asperger's Has Asperger's Syndrome Asperger's Asperger's Syndrome On the spectrum With autism AS/ASD Autism Spectrum Disorder Autism Spectrum ASC/Autism Spectrum Condition Suffers from autism Classic Autistic	Moving away from the viewing autism as a disorder that someone “has,” towards respecting different neurotypes. Asperger's or Asperger's syndrome is no longer an official clinical diagnosis, and people may be assessed to determine if they are Autistic, and if so, confirmed as being Autistic. The history behind the formerly diagnostic term ‘Asperger's’ forms part of the context for moving away from this terminology. The term “Asperger's” derived from the work of Hans Asperger, a psychiatrist who worked with the Nazis and employed abhorrent descriptions of Autistic children. Autistic Realms explains why “on the spectrum” or “with autism” are not helpful: 

Autism Class	ASD Unit Autism Unit Unit	Children and adults, regardless of their neurotype, are taught in classrooms, not units. There is no requirement or need for a school to use the DSM-5 term “ASD” when referring to Autistic students. Avoid abbreviations that dehumanise.
Disability Difference	Disorder	Disability is not a ‘dirty’ word. People should be free to choose to declare themselves disabled, receive the support they need, and not be shamed or be reacted to negatively for doing so either from individuals or societal structures. “Disability” or “Difference” encourages a move towards a more inclusive and respectful approach to neurodiversity. Advocates for reclaiming and owning the terms "disabled" and "disability" as neutral descriptors of difference and identity challenge stigma and promote disability pride and empowerment. “Disorder” suggests there is something inherently wrong or dysfunctional about a person.
Differences Challenges Needs	Deficits/ Impairment	Highlights the uniqueness of neurodivergent individuals without framing their challenges or characteristics as deficits or impairments. Using "difference" emphasises the value of neurodiversity and promotes a more positive and inclusive perspective, focusing on strengths rather than limitations. “Differences” recognises that diverse ways of thinking, perceiving, and experiencing the world contribute to the richness of human diversity and should be celebrated. Using “challenges” recognises that there are disabling environments and barriers arising from systems and practices designed to neuronormative standards.

Individuals with specific support requirements; Individuals with diverse needs; Individuals with a disability; Disabled person; Neurodivergent; Additional Needs;	Special Needs Special (for example, special education or special class)	The phrase “special needs” can cause harm in several ways. First, disability accommodations are not special, and framing them that way may increase stigma. Second, euphemisms for disability make it seem like disability is a shameful word. Referring to “special needs” can infantilise people. Their needs and rights are not extra or special but are derived from the same fundamental civil rights of all people. Framing a person or their needs as special promotes segregation.
Autistic or Neurodivergent development trajectory	Regression Missing Milestones Developmental Delay Problematic development Developmental difficulties “Has the mental age of ...” “Acts like an x year old” "Developmental age of a..."	“Different development trajectory” acknowledges that neurodivergent individuals may follow unique paths of growth and change that are not predictable according to traditional perspectives. This language recognises that development is ongoing, and multifaceted, and acknowledges the unique experience of many neurodivergent individuals in their ongoing development. “Regression” or missing milestones implies backward development or lack of progress, which can be stigmatising for neurodivergent individuals who experience periods of developmental change that diverge from typical expectations. Neurodivergent children may experience challenges with basic needs such as toileting/feeding.
Support Adjustments or Adaptations to the environment or systems	Treatment Cures Therapy to “cure” Interventions Fix autism/Cure autism/Treat autism	Using this language emphasises the need to create environments that support and accommodate diverse needs and promote equitable participation. The language recognises neurodiversity as a natural aspect of human variation and focuses on quality of life and internal wellbeing. On the other hand, "treatment/cures" or “interventions” suggest a deficit-oriented and pathologising approach, implying that

		neurodivergent individuals need fixing or curing. This can reinforce stigma and undermines self-acceptance and inclusion.
Non-speaking Speaking at times Minimally speaking Communication differences Prefers to communicate using.... Communicates other than mouth words	Non-verbal Pre-verbal	"Non-speaking" is preferred because it accurately describes individuals who primarily communicate through methods other than spoken language, such as sign language, gestures, or augmentative and alternative communication (AAC). This term recognises the diverse ways non-speaking individuals communicate, without suggesting they don't communicate at all. In contrast, "non-verbal" might wrongly imply a total lack of communication ability, which is not accurate for those who use alternative forms of communication effectively. Using "non-speaking" respects the various communication methods of these neurodivergent individuals.
Characteristic	Symptoms Signs Impairments Deficit Difficulties attributed to being autistic	Characteristic is the preferred term because it acknowledges that neurodiversity is an inherent aspect of an individual's identity, personality, or cognitive profile. This term supports the individual uniqueness of neurodivergent people, highlighting their strengths and challenges. On the other hand, "signs/symptoms" may imply a medicalised perspective, framing neurodiversity as a collection of problems or challenges to be addressed through treatment or curing. Neuroaffirmative practices reject the notion of treating or curing autism, instead focusing on understanding, accepting, and accommodating neurodiverse characteristics.
Neurotypical	Normal	"Neurotypical" is the preferred term because it accurately describes individuals who do not have neurological differences, without implying superiority or normality. This term recognises the diversity of neurological profiles and avoids stigmatising language that suggests deviations from a norm. On the other hand, "Normal" may imply a standard or ideal, reinforcing "societal norms" and marginalising neurodivergent individuals.

Intellectual disability Developmental disability	Retard Handicapped	Using the preferred language respects the dignity and humanity of individuals with cognitive differences and acknowledges the challenges they may face without resorting to derogatory language. “Retard” is deeply offensive and harmful, and perpetuates hurtful stereotypes, and devalues the inherent worth and humanity of individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities. ‘Handicapped’ is outdated, and can cause offence to individuals with disabilities as it carries negative connotations and focuses on limitations, not abilities.
Sensory Processing Differences Sensory Differences Autistic Sensory Perception	Sensory Processing Disorder Sensory Abnormalities	Each individual has a unique way of processing information and experiencing the environment around them. Differences in sensory experiences are natural and should not be seen as deviations from a perceived norm. “Disorder” suggests there is something inherently wrong or dysfunctional about how an individual processes information and reacts to the environment. Using the preferred language embraces diversity in how neurodivergent individuals perceive and interact with the environment, and supports differences in sensory experiences creating an inclusive environment.
Support Needs	High/Low Functioning Mild/severe	"Support Needs" is preferred because it recognises the individualised supports or accommodations required to address the unique strengths, challenges, and preferences of neurodivergent individuals. This term avoids categorising individuals based on functioning labels, which can oversimplify and stigmatise their experiences.

Dysregulated Meltdown	Disruptive Bold Behavioural outburst Challenging behaviour Behaviour of concern Tantrum other critical terms	"Dysregulated" is the preferred term because it accurately describes a state of imbalance in the central nervous system or instability in emotional or sensory regulation without using stigmatising language. This term recognises the challenges faced by neurodivergent individuals in managing their emotions or responses to stimuli, and acknowledges that neurodivergent people often experience environments differently to others. Meltdown can occur when a neurodivergent person is overwhelmed in response to stimuli and the term signals nervous system distress. In contrast, critical terms may imply a lack of self-discipline or a view that the behaviour is chosen, which can reinforce misconceptions and negative stereotypes.
Passion Passionate Hobby Areas of strength Area of expertise Hyperfocus Attention to detail Focussed interest	Obsessive Obsessed Special Interest Rigid interest Repetitive interest	Having a passion for and being passionate about something are preferred terms as they convey the deep interest and strong focus a neurodivergent individual may have for a particular topic, item, activity etc. Conversely, using words "obsessive" or "obsessed" about an interest suggests an unhealthy fixation on that interest, which disregards the happiness and self-regulatory capacity of the particular interest. Special interest implies that there is something unusual about the neurodivergent person's hobby.
Authentic communication Connection	Social Skills	Neurotypical social skills training is fully rejected by the neurodiversity paradigm, where comparisons to the practice of gay conversion therapy are made. Like all behaviour-based models, neurotypical social skills training encourages neurodivergent people to mask or hide their true selves (which decades of psychological research have shown us is a core

		element of positive mental health) and instead promotes masking. It leads to internalised feelings of shame and the person's core ways of being and interacting are presented as something to hide and change. It ignores Milton's double empathy: any difficulties in communication are mutual and are not located in the neurodivergent person alone.
World Autism Day World Autism Month	Autism Acceptance Day Autism Acceptance Month	We advocate for moving from Autism Acceptance Day and Autism Acceptance Month to recognising "World Autism Day" and "World Autism Month". Autistic people should not have to seek anyone's 'acceptance'. Rather than placing the onus on autistic people to seek acceptance, we encourage non autistic people to educate themselves on autism, and what supports autistic people might need so as to be included within communities.

Preferred Positive Imagery



The rainbow infinity symbol aims to promote a positive and inclusive view of neurodivergence, challenging the notion that people are 'puzzling' or 'broken' and instead emphasising their unique strengths and abilities. The rainbow colours signifies the diversity of experience within neurodiversity and the infinity symbol represents the infinite potential of neurodivergent people.



The gold infinity symbol is used by the autistic community as the first two letters of autism and autistic are "Au" which is the chemical symbol for gold.



The butterfly symbol is used to show the beauty of diversity and many feel it represents constant motion and how ADHD brains may flit between things.

Negative Imagery to Avoid

	The puzzle piece was introduced by the National Autistic Society in 1963, intended to reflect the complexity and puzzling nature of autism. It is associated with the view that autistic people are “missing” a piece of their puzzle and that they are a problem that needs to be solved. This symbol objectifies and dehumanises and is considered offensive. The use of the ribbon suggests autism is a disease that must be cured. The use of primary colours infantilises neurodivergent people and in particular autistic people, suggesting they remain child-like forever.
	The use of the colour blue (for example, “lighting up blue” in April for Autism) is considered to perpetuate the belief that autism relates to males only. The use of blue is harmful for autistic girls who often go without diagnosis and when they are diagnosed people tend to ignore their differences and needs. The concept originated from Autism Speaks, an American organisation formed to find a “cure” for autism including by funding research into genetics/eugenics.

Neurodiversity Ireland wants to change how Irish society views neurodivergence. We are asking you to unlearn, and re-learn, learn from the neurodivergent community, ever exploring your own, ever-looping knowledge.

Thank you for your continued support!

