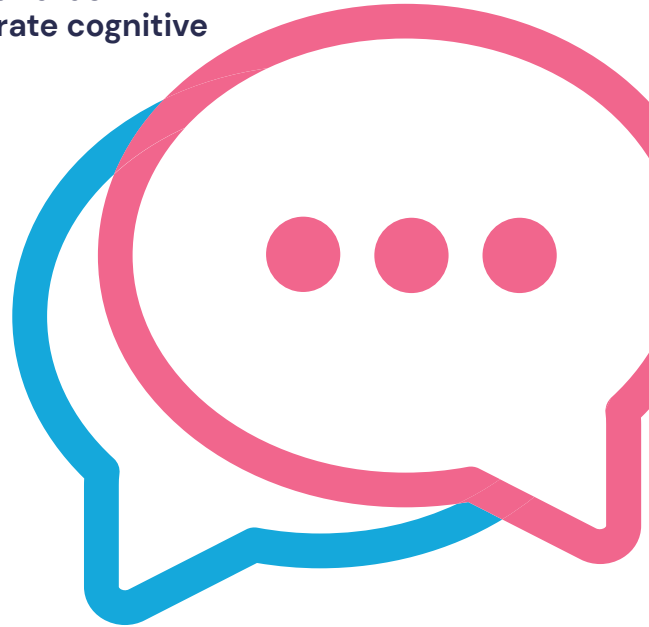


Neurodiversity-affirming Language

Using neurodiversity-affirming language is a vital step towards creating inclusive environments that respect and celebrate cognitive differences.

Instead of viewing conditions like autism, ADHD, dyslexia, or Tourette's as dysfunctions or problems to be fixed, affirming language recognises these variations as natural expressions of human diversity. It shifts the view from "fixing" individuals to understanding and supporting their unique ways of thinking, communicating, and experiencing the world.

This approach not only reduces stigma but also empowers neurodivergent people to embrace their identities with pride and authenticity.



✓ Neurodiversity-affirming phrases vs. ✗ Traditional language

✗ Instead of...

- "Normal" vs. "Abnormal"
- "Low/high functioning"
- "Non-verbal"
- "Special needs"
- "Meltdown/tantrum"
- "Deficits/problems"
- "Treatment/intervention"

✓ Say this...

- "Neurotypical" vs "Neurodivergent"
- "Requires more/less support in specific areas"
- "Minimally speaking" or "Communicates differently"
- "Support needs"
- "Sensory overload" or "Emotional regulation need"
- "Differences/challenges"
- Support/therapy



Why It Matters

- Avoids implying one brain type is the default or ideal.
- Recognises variability and avoids oversimplification.
- Honours different communication styles.
- Focuses the individuals experience and autonomy.
- Validates the underlying cause of the behaviour.
- Encourages a strengths-based perspective.
- Focuses on empowerment rather than correction.

X Instead of...

- "Autism/ADHD symptoms" or "suffers from Autism/ADHD"
- "Stimming (as a negative)"
- "ASD/Autism Spectrum Disorder"

✓ Say this...

- "Autism/ADHD traits, or characteristics"
- "Self-regulation" or "Sensory movement"
- "Autistic/On the Autism Spectrum"

💬 Why It Matters

- Frames differences as natural, not pathological.
- Recognises stimming as a healthy coping strategy.
- Recognises that Autism is natural, not a disorder.

These phrases have come from guides like the [Happy Chatters Guide to Neurodiversity-Affirming Language](#) and the [Neurodiverse Connection Language Guide](#), which offer deeper context and examples.

Another great resource is the [How to talk and write about autism](#) guide by The National Autistic Society.

Things to remember:

If you are unsure what language an individual wishes to use, ask them. Their preference should take precedence over what language is recommended to use.

Never tell someone how they should identify.

When speaking about the neurodivergent community as a whole, use the language outlined above.

Over time language can change. Be mindful that change must be driven by the neurodivergent community and if you are unsure whether a particular word or phrase is still community endorsed, just ask.

Using neurodiversity-affirming language can help to reframe how society views and refers to neurodivergent people.

