

## Navigating Neurodiversity-Affirming Language

As professionals and researchers, we need to strive to use the most affirming and least potentially offensive language possible in our professional practice. The following table summarizes the current language preferences within the neurodivergent community as documented in two recent articles (Bottema-Beutel, et al. 2021, Monk, Whitehouse and Waddington 2022) and the results of the recent [Autistic Not Weird Autism Survey \(2022\)](#).

<b>Potentially Offensive</b>	<b>Neurodivergent Preferred</b>	<b>Perspective &amp; Rationale</b>
Autism Spectrum Disorder ASD	Autism, Autistic, Autistic neurotype	'Disorder' is unnecessarily medicalized and reinforces the idea that Autism needs to be fixed or cured. Unfortunately, we do not yet have a generally accepted alternative for the term ADHD which still includes the 'Disorder' term.
Autism Spectrum Condition	Autism, Autistic, Autistic neurotype	While avoiding the use of the term 'disorder', by using the term 'conditions' this phrase remains embedded in medical terminology.
Asperger's, Aspie	Autistic	This term is no longer used diagnostically. Fewer people use the term Asperger's or Aspie nowadays because the term has been stained by Hans Asperger's history of collaborating with the Nazis. Use of this term can reflect ableist attitudes.
Co-morbidity	Co-occurring	Co-morbidity refers to a disease model, and neurodivergence is not a disease. Co-occurring offers a more neutral choice.
Cure, treatment	Specific support or service	Neurodivergence does not need to be cured, treated, or modified.

<b>Potentially Offensive</b>	<b>Neurodivergent Preferred</b>	<b>Perspective &amp; Rationale</b>
Functioning (high/low)	Describe specific support needs, individual strengths, and differences	Functioning labels make global assumptions about how people perform when in reality, support needs change over time and in different contexts. Functioning labels can perpetuate ableist attitudes and communicate unrealistic expectations, so the preference is to describe individual differences and support needs.
Normal person	Allistic, non-autistic or neurotypical	Reflects that neurodivergent traits are different and not abnormal.
Person with autism, person with ADHD	Autistic person, ADHDer / ADHD'er	While some neurodivergent people still prefer to use person-first language, identity-first language is now more preferred because it emphasizes neurodivergence as inseparable from the person and integral part of their identity. This change can be seen in the <a href="#">Autistic Not Weird Autism Survey</a> .
Puzzle pieces Images of people suffering	Any image that reflects positive attitudes to neurodivergence	Puzzle pieces are associated with an organization that has promoted the 'tragedy narrative' of autism, where it is as a disease to be cured. Autistic people don't want to be viewed as a puzzle that must be solved by non-autistic people.
Restricted interests, 'Special Interests'	Focused or intense interests 'Spins'	This is patronizing and deficit-focused language that does not celebrate neurodivergent strengths. 'Spin' is a term that has been reclaimed by neurodivergent people to reflect their deep passions and interests.

Potentially Offensive	Neurodivergent Preferred	Perspective & Rationale
'Suffering from' Autism or ADHD	Is Autistic Is an ADHDer	Avoid implying someone is suffering because of their neurodivergence as this perpetuates the unhelpful 'tragedy' narrative common in disability settings.
Symptoms, deficits, and impairments	Specific neurodivergent experiences	Medical terminology that assumes the characteristics of autistic people are abnormal or deficient.

## References

Autistic Not Weird Autism Survey 2022

<http://autisticnotweird.com/autismsurvey/?fbclid=IwAR3jiAHJUY1FJ8pjvWkWTsBS54afRp82gusB0IEgRjQwY4zlbQjuUUHngX8>

Bottema-Beutel, K., S.K. Kapp, J.N. Lester, N.J. Sasson, and B.N Hand. 2021. "Avoiding ableist language: Suggestions for autism researchers." *Autism in Adulthood* 3(1):18-29.

Monk, R., A.J.O. Whitehouse, and H. Waddington. 2022. "The use of language in autism research." *Trends in Neurosciences* Vol 45(11), 791-793.