Superyou's Guide to Neuroaffirming Language

Building an inclusive, respectful world one word at a time!

What is Neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity refers to the natural and valuable variation in how human brains work and acknowledges that there is no one "right" way to think, learn, or process the world.

These differences include (but are not limited to) autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, Tourette's, intellectual disability, mental health conditions, and more.

At Superyou, we recognise that:

Neurodiversity includes everyone, both neurotypical and neurodivergent individuals.

Neurodivergence refers to brain functioning that diverges from societal norms and expectations.

Language is a powerful tool. The way we speak about neurodivergence shapes how people are understood, supported, and treated.

We are committed to using language that:

* Affirms identity

* Respects lived experience

* Reduces stigma

* Supports autonomy

Key Terms Explained

Neurodiverse

- Refers to the full spectrum of neurocognitive variation—includes *all* neurotypes.

- Emphasizes difference rather than deficit.

- Highlights that brain diversity is natural and valuable.

- A *group* or *population* that includes all kinds of brain wiring— autistic, ADHD, dyslexic, neurotypical, and more.

- Example: "We work in a neurodiverse team with a wide range of strengths and perspectives."

Neurodivergent (ND)

- Describes individuals whose brains function differently from the societal "norm."

- Commonly includes autistic people, ADHDers, dyslexic individuals, and others.

- Recognizes and validates diverse ways of thinking and experiencing the world.

- Example: "We provide affirming support for neurodivergent children and adults."

Neurotypical (NT)

- Describes individuals whose brains align with dominant social and cognitive expectations.

- Not "better" or more "correct"—just a different neurotype.

- Helps contextualize privilege and accessibility in neurodiverse spaces.

Neuroqueer

- A self-identified term for people who challenge both neurotypical and cisgender norms.

- Acts as both an identity and a form of resistance or political expression.

- Reflects intersectionality across neurodivergence, gender, and societal norms.

AuDHDer

- A person who is both autistic and has ADHD.

- Acknowledges the unique experiences and support needs that come from this dual identity.

- Common overlap that deserves tailored, affirming understanding.

Language in Practice

Identity-First vs. Person-First Language

At Superyou, we use **identity-first language** (e.g., "autistic person") unless the individual requests otherwise. This reflects how many neurodivergent people view their neurotype as an intrinsic and valued part of who they are.

We always respect individual preferences. If someone uses person-first language for themselves, we follow their lead.

Words to Avoid & What to Use Instead

Instead of...	Use...	Why?
ASD, Asperger's, "Aspie"	Autistic person	Identity-first, inclusive, not linked to outdated or controversial labels
Non-verbal	Non-speaking	Reflects communication difference, not inability
Symptoms	Traits / Characteristics / Differences	Shifts away from the medical model where 'symptoms' are problems to solve
Treatment / Intervention	Support / Neuro-affirming therapy / Accommodations	ND brains don't need "fixing"; they need understanding and support in their environments
High/Low Functioning	Variable support needs / Individual profile	Functioning changes with environment, and 'high' or 'low' support labels are often misleading and harmful
Special interests (used clinically)	SPINs (Special Interests), Passions, Joys	Reclaimed by the community to reflect the joy and depth of these SPINs!
Challenging behaviours	Experiences of distress / Needs during dysregulation	Descriptive, empathetic, non-blaming

Special needs	Support needs / Access needs	Less euphemistic, more accurate
Selective Mutism	Situationally non-speaking	Contextual and empowering
"Normal" / "Abnormal"	Neurotypical / Neurodivergent	Neutral, non-pathologising

Using Language in Context

Example: Medical vs Affirming Approach

Traditional: "He has severe autism and challenging behaviours."

Neuro-affirming: "He's an autistic person who experiences sensory overwhelm and needs support during busy or unpredictable environments."

Example: Strength-Based Support

Traditional: "She has restricted interests and low social skills."

Neuro-affirming: "She has deep passions in certain topics and prefers 1:1 or quiet social environments."

Disability & the Social Model

We use identity-first language (e.g., "disabled person") and align with the social model of disability, which recognises that people are disabled by barriers in society, not by their differences.

"Disabled" is not a bad word.

Barriers include inaccessible environments, attitudes, and systems and not the person's body or brain.

Functioning Labels: Why We Don't Use Them

Terms like "high-functioning" or "low-functioning" oversimplify and stigmatise.

- "High-functioning" can mask support needs and create unrealistic expectations.
- "Low-functioning" can ignore strengths and limit opportunities.

Instead, we describe:

- What the person can do
- What challenges they experience
- What supports they need

Why We Don't Use the Puzzle Piece

At Superyou, we use the rainbow infinity symbol to represent neurodiversity. We do not use the puzzle piece because:

- It's associated with outdated views of autism as a problem to be solved.
- It perpetuates infantilisation and the search for a "cure."
- It does not reflect the voices of most autistic adults today.

Why Use the Rainbow Infinity Symbol?

- **Infinity** = Infinite Possibilities - The infinity loop represents the infinite diversity and potential within all neurotypes.
- **Rainbow** = Diversity across the broad range of neurological differences. It reflects diversity of identity, experience, and strength—not a linear "spectrum" but a rich, multidimensional landscape.
- **It stands for:**
  - Inclusion and acceptance of all neurotypes
  - Strengths-based perspective that celebrates difference
  - Neurodiversity-affirming values like respect, autonomy, and dignity

Tips for Team Members

Listen First

Ask people how they identify and mirror their preferred language.

Avoid Jargon

Use plain, clear, respectful language when discussing neurodivergence.

Lead with Respect

Assume competence. Ask before helping. Empower choice.

Keep Learning

Neurodiversity language is evolving. Stay curious and open.

Challenge Stigma

Speak up when you hear deficit-based or dehumanising language.

Final Thought

Language isn't just about words. It's about dignity, belonging, and power. At Superyou, we're proud to stand with neurodivergent people in building a more understanding and accessible world.

Let's lead with empathy by using affirming language! This way, we are actively building a society where everyone can thrive.

References & Resources

We acknowledge and are grateful for the neurodivergent voices and resources that inform this guide, including:

- [Jennifer Kemp – Navigating Neurodiversity Language](https://jenniferkemp.com.au/wp/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/resource-navigating-Neuroaffirming-language.pdf)
- [ND Connection – Affirming Language Guide](https://ndconnection.co.uk/resources/p/nd-affirming-language-guide)
- [Reframing Autism – Letter to Your Family](https://reframingautism.org.au/Neuroaffirming-language-a-letter-to-your-family-friends-and-support-network/)
- [Neuroqueer](https://neuroqueer.com/neuroqueer-an-introduction/)
- [NeuroClastic – Why Autistic People Dislike the Puzzle Piece](https://neuroclastic.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Heres-Why-Most-Autistic-People-Hate-the-Puzzle-Piece-Symbol.pdf)