

Language Dos and Don'ts

Neuro-Affirming Terms

Term	Explanation
“Neurodivergent”	A sensitive umbrella term for people whose brains function differently to what is considered 'typical'.
“Neurotypical”	A neutral descriptor for people whose brains benefit from and works with the way society they live in operates.
“Access Requirements”	Centred on inclusion and emphasises that individuals are entitled to specific accommodations, rather than being perceived as simply having needs.
“Accommodations”	Neutral and widely accepted term to describe modifications to support success.
“Difference/Differences”	More holistic phrasing that also considers strengths, as apposed to medical terminology like 'disorder' or 'disease'.
“Characteristics”	Social model alternative to 'symptoms', which makes it sound like a disease.



Needs Work/Context Dependent

Term	Explanation
“Superpower”	Can be empowering, but also dismissive of real struggles. Often tokenistic if not contextualised.
“Gifted”	Can create pressure and misrepresent reality - context dependent.
“High Functioning/Low Functioning”	These terms overshadow and create an unneeded comparison. ‘High Functioning’ disregards the struggles of those who appear independent and well. Functioning levels can also change day to day.
“On the Spectrum”	Common phrasing but is oversimplified and ignores how people may choose to self-identity.
“Suffers from [condition]”	Implies victimhood and removes agency.
“Treatment”	This implies a cure, which is not possible - instead, neurodivergent people support services, respectful therapies, educational and workplace strategies and adjustments.
“Symptoms”	Medical terminology pathologises the experiences of neurodivergent people.

Harmful/Outdated

Term	Explanation
“Normal”	Implies that neurodivergent people are abnormal or lesser.
“Mental”	Stigmatises and trivialises mental health and neurodivergence.
“Deficit/Disordered”	Implies something is wrong and needs to be fixed.
“Problem/Challenging Behaviour”	Blames the individual rather than the context or unmet needs.
“We’re all a bit neurodivergent!”	While we may all have traits associated with these conditions, neurodivergences relate to specific and often disabling differences, and this phrasing undermines and invalidated these experiences. It may also unwittingly discourage access to support.
“Special Needs”	Vague and infantilising; implies a person’s needs are unusual and burdensome.

