

# Neuroaffirming Language - A Parent's Guide

Talking about autism and ADHD  
with respect and understanding



# What Is Neuroaffirming Language?

**Neuroaffirming language focuses on respect, acceptance, and celebration of neurodiversity. It avoids negative or deficit-based terms and instead highlights differences as natural variations in human thinking, communication, and learning.**

**This approach recognises autism, ADHD, and other neurodivergences as meaningful and valuable parts of an individual's identity. By using positive, respectful language, we help create a culture where people feel understood, included, and supported to thrive as their authentic selves.**

# Why Language Matters

The words we use shape how people see themselves and how they are seen by others. Neuroaffirming language matters because it moves away from outdated, deficit-based views of autism, ADHD, and other neurodivergences, and instead reflects respect, acceptance, and understanding.

When we use neuroaffirming words, we:

- **Promote self-esteem and identity,** helping autistic and ADHD individuals feel valued
- **Reduce stigma,** challenging harmful stereotypes and misconceptions.

# Why Language Matters

- **Encourage acceptance**, shifting the focus from “fixing” differences to celebrating them as meaningful parts of human diversity.
- **Support inclusion**, creating safer, more welcoming environments in schools, workplaces, and communities.
- **Empower families**, giving parents, carers, and loved ones the language to talk about neurodivergence in a positive, respectful way.

Using neuroaffirming language isn't just about words, it's about fostering a culture where every neurodivergent person is seen, heard, and supported to thrive as their authentic self.

# Examples of Neuroaffirming Language

Instead of...	Try Saying...
“has a problem with...”	“She / he may find XX challenging”
“suffers from autism...”	“is autistic” or “an autistic person”
“disorder” (e.g. autism spectrum disorder)	“on the autism spectrum”
“High-functioning” or “Low-functioning”	“has varying support needs”
“Normal”	“Neurotypical”

# Positive Ways to Talk About Autism & ADHD

## **“Autistic person” or “Person with ADHD”**

Respecting personal preference and how an individual prefers to be described is the most affirming choice.

## **“Unique strengths and perspectives”**

Individuals with autism and ADHD often bring fresh insights, original thinking, and new ways of approaching situations that others may not see.

## **“Different learning style”**

Learning differences aren't deficits, they reflect varied ways of processing information, problem-solving, and engaging with the world.

# Positive Ways to Talk About Autism & ADHD

## **“Creative problem-solver”**

Many neurodivergent people think outside the box, finding innovative solutions and creative approaches in both everyday and professional contexts.

## **“Resilient and resourceful”**

Navigating a world not always built for neurodivergent people can foster resilience, adaptability, and creative coping strategies.

## **“Authentic and genuine”**

Many neurodivergent people communicate in direct and straightforward ways, which others find refreshing and trustworthy.

# Supporting Conversations

## With your Child

- Use simple, positive language
- Be honest and factual while emphasising strengths

## With Others

- Model respectful terms
- Correct misinformation gently and explain why words matter



# Keep the Conversation Positive

Every child deserves to be spoken about with kindness, respect, and dignity. The words we choose shape how children see themselves and how others understand them. By using neuroaffirming language, we not only avoid harmful stereotypes but actively create a world where neurological differences are recognised, valued, and celebrated.

Neuroaffirming language tells children and the people around them that their way of thinking, learning, and experiencing the world is valid. It helps nurture self-esteem, encourages acceptance, and promotes inclusion in families, schools, and communities. When we speak positively and respectfully, we help every child feel understood, supported, and proud of who they are.