

AUTISM AND LANGUAGE ACCEPTANCE

Language can be a powerful way of describing ourselves. The language around autism, autistic people, and disability more generally, has changed and evolved a great deal in recent years. It continues to change as our understanding of autism shifts and as more autistic people are sharing their experience of what it's like to be autistic.

Many autistic people have different ways of talking about their autism and have different ways that they want to identify themselves.

These are:

- **Identity-first language** (“autistic people”, “disabled people”);
- **Person-first language** (“people with disabilities”, “people with autism”, “lives with autism”).

WHAT TERMS SHOULD WE AVOID WHEN TALKING ABOUT AUTISTIC PEOPLE?

Avoid	Why	Say
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has autism / Suffers from autism • is a victim of autism • Autism is a disease or illness 	<p>Clinical professionals are closely involved in diagnosing autism and developing strategies that support autistic people to meet their support needs. Many autistic people feel strongly about how autism is referred to by professionals, which can often be different to how many Autistic people wish to identify themselves.</p> <p>Autism shouldn't be considered an illness or disease, and autistic people aren't broken people that need to be treated or fixed because of their autism.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ...is autistic • Autistic people
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autism is a disorder • Autism Spectrum Disorder • ASD 	<p>While autism is sometimes seen as a 'disorder', often by people who are not autistic, a lot of Autistic people don't like using 'disorder' to describe being autistic.</p> <p>Many Autistic people do believe that their autism diagnosis is a "difference", rather than a "disorder". This is because an autistic person's way of thinking is not "wrong" or "broken" - just different. Autistic people don't want treatments or cures for their autism or their autistic traits. Instead, everyone in society can make adjustments to accept and include Autistic people and families with autistic people. An autistic person might be disabled by an environment not set up to accommodate their differences.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autism • Autism Spectrum Condition • ASC • ... is autistic • Autistic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autism Spectrum disorder • ASD Unit • Autism Unit 	<p>The word "unit" carries medicalised assumptions around how autistic people are educated, and presumes that all autistic pupils need to be educated in segregated settings, even though this is not the case.</p> <p>Many autistic people are educated in mainstream classrooms. For many autistic people and their families, the word "unit" implies that pupils who are in autism classes are in clinical settings and that they always need to be educated away from their peers, in separate classrooms or schools.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autism Class • ASC Class

Avoid	Why	Say
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High-Functioning • Low-Functioning • Mild, moderate • Severe 	<p>These labels can have harmful effects on autistic people, as they are very broad, and don't fully capture how Autistic people experience being autistic. Autism is such a diverse spectrum of traits and differences that no two people will experience being autistic the same way, or have exactly the same access needs.</p> <p>An individual's support needs might also change over time, and/or across environments depending on their profile and supports available. Having terms like 'mild' or 'high functioning' might mean that an individual might not be given supports when they need them, and those labelled as 'severe' or 'low functioning' might be denied opportunities they are capable of and/or enjoy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support Needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asperger Syndrome 	<p>Asperger Syndrome is no longer an official diagnosis used by clinical professionals. Asperger Syndrome refers to people who experience no speech differences, who are seen to have average or higher levels of intelligence, and who may not need a lot of support. However, it reinforced preconceived ideas around autism, which may not fully reflect what it's actually like to be autistic for many people.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autistic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Backward • Deranged • Handicapped • R*tarded 	<p>Understanding of autism and disability has greatly evolved in recent years. For years, people have used outdated terms about autistic people and disabled people which reinforced harmful stereotypes around autism and disability.</p> <p>Although many autistic people may also experience an intellectual disability or mental health condition, it is wrong to use these terms to 'other' autistic people and disabled people.</p> <p>Many autistic people see their autism as a part of who they are and don't wish to use terms that minimise or separate their disability or difference from their worth, experience or achievements as a person.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disabled people • Autistic people • People with a learning disability • People with developmental difference or disability • People with an intellectual disability

Avoid	Why	Say
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diffability • Handicapable • DisABILITY • Differently abled • Overcame their autism / disability • Despite/ in spite of their autism / disability • Inspirational • Defying their autism / disability • Their autism / disability did not stop them from.. 	<p>Whilst some people can use these terms to try to normalise or celebrate autistic people or disabled people, they can reinforce negative stereotypes or can suggest that it is not OK to simply be autistic or disabled, that they must also be inspirational in some way. It also implies that their disability or autism itself is keeping them from ever doing what they want to do.</p> <p>Whilst your child isn't inspirational just because they are autistic or disabled, they have lots of positive personal traits that you might find inspiring and that could help them to succeed and be happy with in their life. THIS is something to celebrate and embrace about your child. Whilst some people may use these terms or identify with them, they should be avoided generally speaking.</p> <p>Autism and disability aren't dirty words. It shouldn't be seen as something that is taboo, a negative aspect of a person to avoid, or an obstacle to overcome. It is absolutely possible to be successful, do well in life and achieve great things, and still be disabled or autistic.</p> <p>We needn't be afraid of using these terms when talking about autistic and disabled people, as these are the terms that the Autistic and much of the disability community want to use.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autistic • Disabled

Avoid	Why	Say
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Special needs Special Needs children, Children with Special Needs Special 	<p>Many disabled people consider “special” or “special needs” to be patronising and inappropriate, as it can reinforce outdated attitudes around autism and disability - that see autistic people as objects of pity, rather than having rights.</p> <p>It’s really important to remember that the needs or rights of autistic and disabled people are not “extra” or “special”. Autistic and disabled people have the same rights as everybody else, even if they might sometimes need different supports to access or enjoy these rights.</p> <p>“Special needs” can be used in an educational context to refer to pupils with additional needs (i.e. some autistic people, or disabled people who have additional needs related to their education) who might attend a special school or an autism class for part or all of their school week.</p> <p>Whilst ‘special needs’ and ‘special education’ are terms in use in schools and other settings to refer to the needs of autistic and disabled children, it is better to avoid using “special needs” to refer to autism (or disability more generally) as many in the autism and disability communities take offence to the use of these terms.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disabled people Autistic people Disabled people Within an education context, you can also use: Support needs Additional needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Normally developing children 	<p>Using “normal” when referring to non-autistic people implies that autistic people are somehow ‘abnormal’ or ‘broken’ for developing differently from their neurotypical peers or that they need to be ‘fixed’ or ‘cured’.</p> <p>We should see autism and disability as something to embrace as a part of human diversity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Neurotypical Non-autistic children

What should we say?	Why
Autistic person/Autistic	<p>Many autistic people use "Autistic person" because they see their autism as a core part of their identity, and as central to who they are and how they experience and understand the world.</p> <p>Many autistic people also see their autism as a natural part of human thinking that has always existed. Many autistic people see their autism as both a difference and a disability.</p>
Autism is a difference/disability	<p>Whilst autism is first and foremost a different way of understanding the world, it is also considered a disability, not least in the sense that not everyone in society will always understand, accommodate or include autistic ways of thinking, understanding or processing the world.</p> <p>There are aspects of how society is organised and structured which can all shape how an autistic person might feel accepted and included in society: like the physical and sensory environments; how we communicate; how we socialise; access to services and supports; or society's attitudes to autistic people.</p> <p>If these access needs are not addressed, this can disable autistic people from being accepted and included in society, and from being treated equally.</p>
Support needs	<p>This refers to the level and the type of support that an autistic person might need in aspects like education or everyday living. These can differ from person to person as set out by the DSM-5. This replaced functioning labels used by previous DSMs to adjudicate an autistic person's level of support needs.</p> <p>These range from: Level 1 ("Requiring support"), where an autistic person might need some supports; Level 2 ("Requiring substantial support"), where an autistic person might need more substantial or intense support; and Level 3 ("Requiring very substantial support"), where an autistic person may require a lot of support or more intense supports, to go about their everyday lives.</p>