

# Neurodiversity Glossary

This glossary explores some commonly used words when discussing Autistic experiences.

## **AAC (Augmented and Alternative Communication)**

Communicating in ways other than spoken words. This can include specific AAC devices, letterboards, sign language, text, pictures, drawings, objects, or cards. It's a myth that using AAC impedes the development of spoken communication; there is no evidence to support this.

## **ABA/PBS (Applied Behaviour Analysis and Positive Behaviour Support)**

Highly controversial behaviourist systems focused on promoting compliance. These practices are linked with LGBTI conversion therapy and are not evidence-based. They are associated with increased cPTSD symptoms in Autistics.

## **Ableism**

Discrimination against someone based on their disability.

## **Alexithymia**

Greek for "no words for emotions." Experienced by roughly 50% of Autistic people, it is characterized by difficulty recognizing and expressing emotions or describing their origins.

## **Allist (Noun)**

A person who is not Autistic. Example: "She is an allist."

## **Allistic (Adjective)**

Describing someone who is not Autistic. Example: "He is allistic."

## **Autism**

A lifelong neurodevelopmental difference where the brain operates in a way that is different from the neuromajority and consistent with Autistic people.

## **Autist (Noun)**

A person who is Autistic. Example: "They are an autist."

## **Autistic (Adjective)**

Describing someone with an Autistic brain. Example: "She is Autistic."

### **Autistic Burnout**

A deep, long-term crisis point for Autistic people, often triggered by multiple crises (meltdowns, shutdowns, elopements), excessive masking, and high stress. Symptoms can include loss of skills, fatigue, sensory intolerance, anxiety, need for sameness, and emotional dysregulation. It may resemble depression and can lead to suicidal ideation.

### **Atypical Burnout**

Burnout that does not present in a typical way, often involving hyper-awareness of danger, also known as "meerkat mode."

### **Autistic Inertia**

Difficulty starting or stopping a task. Example: Struggling to start vacuuming but then cleaning extensively once started.

### **Body Doubling**

Supporting another by being present while each person completes their tasks. It can also involve reminders for tasks like drinking water. This can be done online or in person.

### **Double Empathy Problem**

Proposed by Damian Milton in 2012, it suggests that both Autistic and non-Autistic people struggle to understand each other, countering the notion that communication issues are solely the fault of Autistic individuals.

### **Echolalia**

Repeating phrases from books, TV, movies, or others. Often used meaningfully by Autistic people, contrary to the belief that it's meaningless.

### **Elopement**

When an Autistic person physically leaves an area due to a need to escape, similar to a meltdown or shutdown.

### **Empathy**

Different ways to experience and show empathy:

- *Cognitive Empathy*: Understanding how someone else feels or thinks.
- *Emotional Empathy*: Feeling the same emotions as someone else.
- *Compassionate Empathy*: Understanding how someone feels and being motivated to help.

### **Executive Functioning**

Cognitive processes required to recognize a task, know the steps, and complete it in a timely manner.

### **Functioning Labels**

Outdated terms like “high functioning” or “low functioning” are problematic. They don't account for dynamic needs and often lead to inappropriate support. It's better to refer to specific support needs.

### **Identity First Language**

Using the term "Autistic person" rather than "person with Autism," generally preferred by the Autistic community.

### **Infinity Symbol**

A symbol often in gold for Autistic acceptance or rainbow for neurodiversity, designed by Autistic people.

### **Infodump**

Sharing a lot of information on a passionate topic at once, often considered an Autistic love language.

### **Interoception**

Awareness of internal body signals like hunger, temperature, pain, or needing to use the bathroom. Autistic people may have varied responses to this sense.

### **Intersectionality**

Recognition that a person may have multiple intersecting identities, such as being Autistic, Black, non-binary, and queer, which inform their experiences and perceptions.

### **Masking**

Hiding and suppressing Autistic traits to appear less Autistic, often done subconsciously from an early age.

**Meltdown**

A neurological event releasing a burst of emotions due to sensory, cognitive, or emotional overload, different from tantrums.

**Monotropism**

A theory suggesting that Autistic minds focus strongly on a few interests at a time, leaving less processing space for other tasks. For more, visit the [Monotropism website](#).

**Neuroaffirming**

Working with someone's neurotype rather than against it. Neuroaffirming environments support Autistic individuals without encouraging them to reduce stimming or give eye contact.

**Neurodiversity**

Natural variations in the human brain, similar to biodiversity in biological life.

**Neurodiverse**

A group that includes different neurotypes (e.g., Autistic, ADHD, OCD). An individual cannot be neurodiverse, as they have only one brain.

**Neurodivergent**

Describes brains that are not neurotypical, such as Autism, ADHD, Tourette's, and anxiety. Neurodivergence can be inherent or acquired.

**Neurotype**

Refers to the kind of brain you have. Example: "What's your neurotype?" "I'm Autistic and dyspraxic."

**Neurotypical**

Someone who is not neurodivergent. This term is often incorrectly used to mean "not Autistic."

**Non-speaking**

Someone who does not use spoken words to communicate but may use AAC devices, sign language, or other methods. Non-speaking people can be very verbal in other ways.

### **Occupational Therapist**

A healthcare professional who helps with sensory needs, hypermobility, and rehabilitation after injury.

### **Palilalia**

Repeating one's own words or phrases, as opposed to repeating from other sources (see echolalia).

### **Parallel Play**

Engaging in separate activities alongside someone. Example: "Do you want to parallel play tonight? I'll play solitaire while you play a video game."

### **PDA (Pathological Demand Avoidance)**

An Autistic profile involving an overwhelming need to avoid demands, often due to extreme anxiety.

### **Perseveration**

Focusing intensely on a specific idea or activity to the exclusion of all else, often in response to an injustice.

### **Person First Language**

Using the term "person with Autism," more commonly used by non-Autistic people.

### **Proprioception**

Awareness of body position relative to the environment. Autistic people may have varied proprioceptive responses, leading to bumping into things.

### **Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria**

A heightened emotional response to perceived rejection or criticism, often leading to perfectionism.

### **SALT (Speech and Language Therapists)**

Professionals involved in assessing and supporting communication difficulties, providing resources for non-speaking Autistic people.

### **Samefood**

Eating the same meal or snack regularly. Example: Always having the same kind of soup for lunch.

### **Sensory Overwhelm**

When sensory input becomes too much to process, possibly leading to a crisis point.

### **Sensory Underwhelm**

When sensory input is insufficient, requiring more stimulation. Less discussed than sensory overwhelm but equally dysregulating.

### **Shutdown**

A neurological event resulting in an implosive reaction to sensory, cognitive, or emotional overload. May involve hiding, curling up, and difficulty speaking.

### **Situational Mutism**

Inability to speak in certain situations due to factors like anxiety, sensory input, tiredness, hunger, or social exhaustion. It's not a choice.

### **Autistic/ Neurodivergent (Special) Interest**

A hobby or interest that an Autistic person is very passionate about. Special interests can help with emotional regulation.

### **Stimming**

Self-stimulatory behaviours like hand flapping, rocking, or repeating words. Stimming provides sensory feedback and helps with regulation, memory, and enjoyment.

### **Vestibular**

The sense of balance and stability. Sensory-seeking individuals may enjoy spinning or swinging, while those with increased responsiveness may be uncomfortable with movement.