Why Language Matters

NeuroPathways CLINIC

The words we use shape how people feel about themselves and how included they feel in their environment.
Using respectful and accurate language can:

- Reduce stigma
- Support identity and self-expression
- Promote understanding and inclusion
- Help people feel seen, valued and respected

Everyone has the right to describe themselves in the way that feels most comfortable to them.

Neurodiversity	A concept recognising that all humans have different brains and ways of thinking, communicating and experiencing the world. These differences are natural and valuable - similar to ideas such as biodiversity or cultural diversity.
Neurodivergent	A term used to describe an individual whose brain processes information or communicates in ways that differ from what society considers "typical".
Neurodiverse	A term used to describe a group of people with different types of brains and ways of thinking. It should not be used to describe a single individual.
Autism	A neurodevelopmental condition that exists on a spectrum, meaning experiences and traits vary widely. Autistic people may experience differences in social communication and interaction, alongside repetitive or focused behaviours. Many autistic individuals also demonstrate strengths such as deep focus, creativity, pattern recognition and specialist knowledge.
Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)	A neurodevelopmental condition involving differences in attention, impulse control, emotional regulation and activity levels. People with ADHD often thrive in fast-paced environments and may demonstrate strengths in innovation, creativity and problem-solving.
Dyslexia	A learning difference that primarily affects reading, decoding written language and spelling.
Dysgraphia	A learning difference affecting fine-motor coordination in handwriting. This can impact written accuracy, spelling, grammar and punctuation but does not affect verbal ability.
Dyscalculia	A difference in number processing, which can affect mathematical reasoning, calculations and learning maths-related facts.
Dyspraxia	A developmental difference that affects coordination and motor skills, which may influence activities such as writing, drawing or physical movement.
Tourette Syndrome	A neurological difference characterised by involuntary movements or vocalisations known as tics.

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Do's

Ask people their preference
Language preferences can vary. Respect how someone chooses to describe themselves.

Use identity-respecting language
Terms like neurodivergent are often preferred because they focus on difference rather than deficit.

Focus on strengths as well as challenges
Neurodivergent experiences include creativity, deep focus, problem-solving and unique perspectives.

Use "neurodiverse" for groups
For example: "Our team is neurodiverse."

Be open to learning
Language evolves, and being willing to listen and adapt helps create inclusive environments.

Don't

Don't assume someone's preferred language
Not everyone uses the same terms.

Don't describe neurodivergence only as a deficit or problem
Avoid language that frames individuals as "broken" or needing to be "fixed".

Don't use "neurodiverse" for one person
It refers to groups, not individuals.

Don't label people without their input
Respect autonomy and identity.

Don't focus only on diagnoses
A person is more than a label.

Different brains make the world more creative, interesting and innovative.

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