

ABCs of NEURODIVERSITY



A

AA

An acronym for Actually Autistic.

AAC

An acronym for Augmentative and Alternative Communication. AAC is a type of communication that doesn't rely on mouth words. Some autistic or neurodivergent folks may use an AAC device for communication.

ABA

An acronym for Applied-Behavior Analysis. ABA is a school of thought where all behavior is believed to occur (and can be changed) as a result of rewards and consequences. ABA is disliked by the majority of the neurodivergent community.

Abled

A non-disabled person.

Ableism

A discriminatory attitude or belief that prioritizes of abled and neurotypical ways of interacting with the world.

Access needs (support needs)

Anything a person needs to participate in different aspects of the world (e.g. space, event, or relationship). All people have access needs, but because the world was designed for non-disabled folks and thus their access needs are met by default, we tend to only associate access needs with disabled people.

ADHD

An acronym for Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder.

Alexithymia

A difficulty in recognizing and identifying feelings in oneself.

Allistic

A person who is not Autistic. This includes people who are neurodivergent but not Autistic.

AuDHD

A person who is both Autistic and ADHD.

Autist

An Autistic person. Used synonymously with Autistic.

Autistiphobia

A fear or prejudice against Autistic people.

Autistic

An identifier for a person who is professionally or self-diagnosed on the autism spectrum. Identity-first language (i.e. "an autistic person") is preferred by the majority of the Autistic community over person-first language (i.e. "a person with autism").

B

Burnout

A state of stress and exhaustion in an autistic person, often due to prolonged periods of masking and/or unmet needs.

C

Camouflaging (masking)

The process in which an Autistic or neurodivergent person suppresses their natural tendencies and replaces them with unnatural ones to conform to societal expectations.

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Compliant/Compliance

The prioritization of doing what one is told rather in order to meet the requirements of a task. In some educational settings, it is more important that the children are compliant with the norms of the classroom such as sitting still and looking at the teacher, than are the goals of the task, such as listening and learning.

Concluder

A communication style where the intention of communicating is to make a point. Most people communicate in a concluder style. Concluders may take tangents, but their communication is defined by starting at one point and ending at another. Also see *weavers*.

Consent

Permission given by an individual for something to happen. Never assume consent.

Crisis (meltdown)

An acute event experienced by an Autistic person caused by the stress and exhaustion of needs going unmet and/or as the result of overwhelming sensory stimuli. The term "meltdown" is often used synonymously with "tantrum," which implies that the person's distress is an unreasonable response to the situation. The term "crisis" better reflects the fact that these moments are not character flaws, but the result of needs going unmet.

D

Delayed echolalia

A communication style in which utterances that are repeated after a long pause. Also see *echolalia*.

Disability or disabled

A difference in ability that is incompatible with a world that was built for non-disabled people.

Dis/ability

A shorthand that encompasses both the disabled and abled communities.

Double empathy problem

The theory that social and communication difficulties between non-autistic folks and Autistic folks are due to different neurotypes having different styles of communicating and socializing. Before this theory was formed, many non-autistic folks mislabeled Autistic folks as not having empathy. The double empathy problem posits that the misunderstanding of communication and socialization styles goes both ways and that many autistic folks are incredibly, if not overly, empathetic.

E

Echolalia

A communication style of repeated language or sounds first used by others.

Evidence-based

A term used to describe a concept or strategy that has been evaluated to ensure that the goals of the program are being met. The goals of many autism research programs are most often to make autistic kids appear more neurotypical and thus evidence-based programs often do more harm than good.

G

Gestalt language

A style of language development that begins with multi-word forms, or "gestalt forms," and ends with novel utterances. Children who are gestalt learners use echolalia as an early form of language and then develop novel language from these echolalic utterances.

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H

Hyperlexia

A skill of advanced reading ability, typically beyond what is expected for a child's age.

I

Immediate echolalia

A communication style in which utterances are repeated instantly or after a brief delay. Also see *echolalia*.

Intersectionality

A lens used to understand how privilege and oppression interacts with one another. Intersectionality acknowledges that of our individual identities do not occur in a vacuum but are rather inextricably tied to one another. For example, if someone is White and trans, their Whiteness cannot be separated from their transness.

Interoception

The perception of sensations in the body. These sensations include fullness, pain, a need to go to the bathroom, tiredness, and more, and can impact a person's ability to identify what their body needs (i.e. hunger, thirst, sleep, etc.).

M

Masking

See *camouflaging*.

Meltdown

See *crisis*.

N

Neurodivergent

An umbrella term used to describe anyone whose brain diverges from what is considered typical. This includes, but is not limited to: autism, ADHD, dissociative identity disorder (DID), dyslexia, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) complex post-traumatic stress disorder (C-PTSD), dyspraxia, sensory processing disorder (SPD), dyscalculia, dysgraphia, bipolar, epilepsy, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), tic disorders, schizophrenia, misophonia, down syndrome, bipolar, and more.

Note: The term *neurodiverse* is often used incorrectly to describe a neurodivergent person. See *neurodiverse*.

Neurodiverse

A group of people that includes more than one neurotype (e.g. Autistic and neurotypical). Neurodiverse cannot be used for a single person as one person cannot be diverse.

Neurodiversity

A term used to describe diversity in neurotype. Neurodiversity implies that there is no one right way to think or do things and that brains function differently from person to person.

Neurodiversity paradigm

A lens which asserts that all neurotypes are normal and necessary components of human diversity, and do not need to be "cured" or "treated."

Neurotype

A way to categorize brain functionality. Autistic, allistic, and neurotypical are to neurotype as gay, straight, and pansexual are to sexuality.

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Neurotypical

A person whose brain functions in a way that is considered standard or typical.

Non-traditional speaker

A person who uses a form of communication other than mouth words.

P

PDA

According to the DSM-5, an acronym for Pathological Demand Avoidance. This term has been reclaimed by the neurodivergent communities as an acronym for Pervasive Drive for Autonomy.

Proprioception

The body's ability to sense movement action and location.

S

Self-advocacy

The ability to represent one's own needs and interests in order to accomplish goals that have been identified for oneself.

Sensory needs

Individual needs that pertain to one's senses. These needs can include needing more intense sensory stimulation or reducing sensory stimulation.

Social skills

A set of correct and desirable behaviors that are seen as necessary to interact with others. Social skills are derived from ableist prioritization of neurotypical behaviors.

Speller/SPELLiverse

A form of AAC in which a person spells to communicate.

Special interest (SpIn) or passion

A highly focused preoccupation or obsession for an Autistic person. The Autistic community in general has moved away from the term special interest due to the infantilizing valence of the word "special." Passions for Autistic people can lead to remarkable dedication and can have positive mental health benefits.

Spoon Theory/Spoons

A framework in which spoons represent a unit of energy. Spoon theory is used to characterize the amount of energy that different tasks take for different people. Initially developed to help people better understand chronic illness, this theory has been adopted by the neurodivergent community as a way to think about capacity.

Stim/Stimming

A repetitive action that is soothing or creates joy for the person doing it.

Support needs

See *access needs*.

V

Vestibular system

A sensory system that supports person's sense of balance. The vestibular system is an additional way our bodies make sense of the world beyond the five senses (i.e. taste, touch, smell, hear, and eyesight).

W

Weaver

A communication style of adding facts, quotes, and stories to the conversation to create a larger web of understanding. Weavers, unlike concloders, do not always communicate to make a point. Also see *concloders*.