aspect
Autism Spectrum Australia

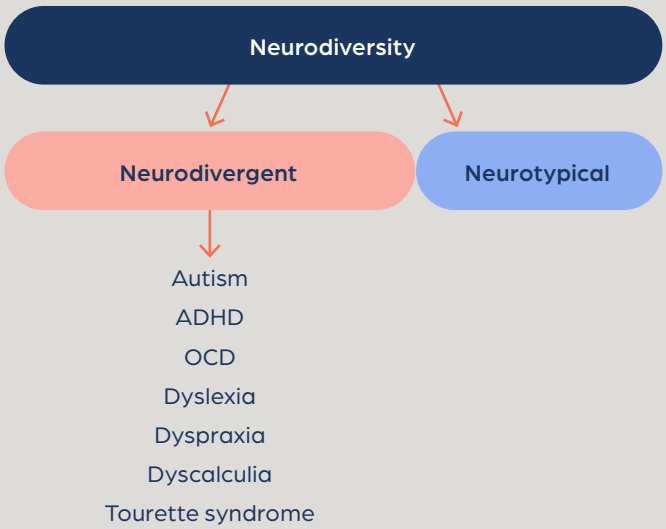
Autism and neurodiversity: common terms explained

In today's society, where inclusivity is recognised as essential, understanding the diversity of human experiences is more important than ever. Terms like neurodiversity, neurodivergent, neurodivergence, neurotypical and neurodiverse are gaining wider recognition, but their meanings can sometimes be misunderstood or used incorrectly.

Our purpose
a different brilliant®

Understanding, engaging and celebrating the strengths, interests and aspirations of people on the autism spectrum.

This information sheet clarifies these concepts and terms, offering clear definitions and explanations to deepen understanding of how neurological differences shape the ways people perceive and interact with the world.



Neurodiversity is the idea that variations in neurological functioning (how the brain works) – such as autism, ADHD and dyslexia – are natural and valuable parts of human diversity. Rather than viewing these differences as deficits, neurodiversity recognises them as part of the rich spectrum of human experience, each contributing unique strengths and perspectives.

This perspective challenges the traditional view that neurological differences are problems to be fixed. Instead, it promotes the understanding that different ways of thinking, learning, and interacting with the world enrich our society. For example, individuals with dyslexia might excel in creative thinking, while those with ADHD may bring energy and innovative problem-solving skills.

Autism and neurodivergency: common terms explained

Neurotypical is a term used to describe individuals whose brain development and functioning align with what is considered typical or standard within society. The term neurotypical is often used to draw a distinction between those whose brain functioning is typical and those whose brains are differently wired (neurodivergent). It is important to recognise that "typical" does not mean "better," and that diversity in neurological functioning is something to be embraced and respected.

Neurodivergence refers to the range of differences in individual brain function and behavioural traits that deviate from what is considered neurotypical. It includes autism, ADHD and dyslexia.

Neurodivergence highlights the natural diversity in how people think, learn and interact with the world. It is a term that reinforces the idea that these differences should not be treated as a condition but rather seen as aspects of human diversity. Recognising neurodivergence helps foster an environment where all individuals are respected for their unique ways of being.

Neurodivergent is used to describe individuals whose brain functioning differs from the typical or neurotypical brain, including people on the autism spectrum, those with ADHD, dyslexia and other neurodevelopmental differences.

Autism is a neurodevelopmental condition that influences how a person experiences and interacts with the world. Autism is characterised by differences in communication, social interaction and behaviour, which can vary widely from person to person, leading to the term "spectrum."

As a form of neurodivergence, autism can come with unique strengths, such as deep focus, strong memory and a passion for specific interests. At the same time, Autistic individuals may experience challenges due to differences with social communication, sensory processing and adapting to changes. The spectrum nature of autism means that each Autistic person has their own distinct experience, with varying support needs. Importantly, autism is a lifelong way of being, and with the right understanding and support, Autistic individuals can lead fulfilling lives.

How to use these terms

Using these terms thoughtfully ensures respectful and accurate communication.

Term	How to use
Neurodiversity	Use when discussing the concept of neurological differences as natural and valuable aspects of human diversity.
Neurotypical	Use to describe individuals whose neurological development and functioning is considered typical or standard.
Neurodivergence	Use to describe the range of neurological variations that differ from what is considered typical.
Neurodivergent	Use to describe individuals whose neurological functioning differs from what is considered typical.
Neurodiverse	Use to describe a group that includes a mix of neurotypical and neurodivergent individuals.
Autism	Use specifically when referring to the autism spectrum, whether discussing a diagnosis, the experiences of Autistic individuals, or advocating for autism-related understanding and support.
Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)	Use when referring to a condition that involves challenges with attention, hyperactivity and impulsiveness.
Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)	Use when describing a condition characterised by persistent, unwanted thoughts (obsessions) and repetitive behaviours (compulsions).
Dyslexia	Use when discussing a condition that affects reading, writing and spelling skills, often involving difficulty with processing written language.
Dyspraxia	Use when referring to a condition characterised by challenges with physical coordination, planning or movement.
Dyscalculia	Use when describing a condition characterised by difficulty with understanding numbers, math concepts or performing calculations.
Tourette syndrome	Use when referring to a neurological condition that involves involuntary movements or sounds (tics).

Based on the idea of a different brilliant®, Aspect's approach:

- Respects difference and diversity
- Builds a person's skills based on their strengths, interests, aspirations and support needs
- Develops autism-friendly environments
- Supports others to understand and embrace autism and to develop respectful supportive interactions.