

Neurodiversity Dictionary

Understanding neurodiversity starts with using clear and helpful terms. Learning these words can make it easier to support and speak up for your loved ones. Here is a simple guide to common terms you may hear.

Neurodiversity means that people's brains work in different ways. It reminds us that conditions like autism, ADHD and dyslexia are differences, not problems. A person with one of these differences may be called neurodivergent.

Stimming means repeating actions like hand-flapping, rocking or humming. These actions can help a person calm down, focus or manage strong feelings. Stimming is common and natural for many neurodivergent people.

Masking means hiding or holding back traits to fit in. This can include forcing eye contact or trying not to stim. Masking may help in some social situations, but it can be tiring and stressful.

Hyperfocus is the ability to concentrate deeply on one task or topic. It is often linked to ADHD. Hyperfocus can help someone get a lot done, but it may also make it hard to switch tasks.

Hyperfixation is when someone becomes completely absorbed in an interest. It is often seen in autism and ADHD. A person may lose track of time or ignore other tasks while focused on this interest.

Sensory processing describes how a person reacts to sounds, textures, lights and other input. Some people feel overwhelmed by sensory input. Others seek extra input to feel comfortable.

Executive functioning includes skills like planning, staying organized and managing impulses. These skills can be harder for people with ADHD or autism, but routines and tools can help.

Special interests are strong, focused passions that bring joy. They are common in autism and can help a person learn, create and feel fulfilled.

Learning these terms helps us talk about neurodiversity with respect and care. When we understand this language, we can better connect with others, support their needs and celebrate their strengths.

#NeurodiversityChampions #WhatsStrongWithYou

If you or a loved one is curious about neurodiversity or may be neurodiverse, visit Neurodiversity Education Academy for more resources.

Reviewed by Manager, Autism Resource Program, MA, BCBA, LBA

