



5 Ways to Win

Five tips for your use of terminology and semantics relating to autism.

Usage of terms is often a matter of preference; this guide is designed to inform choices, not to dictate.

1. Using 'autistic' as an identity.

The autistic community often prefer being referred to as 'an autistic person', not 'a person *with* autism' because it puts autism first as part of their identity. In contrast, "a person *with autism*" implies that autism is an affliction that has been imposed on the person, and can feel loaded with negativity. Like "suffers from", it reinforces some enduring stigma and is best avoided.

2. Neurodiversity and 'being neurodiverse'

We like to use 'neurodiversity' to refer to the full scope of human brains and their wiring, just as 'biodiversity' encompasses all living things. It refers to those with 'atypical' wiring, e.g. an autistic brain, as well as neurotypical wiring. In that way, individuals cannot be 'neurodiverse', only a population, although some use the term 'neurodiverse' to refer to those with different wiring.



3. Neuro-what?

There are now a number of terms used to refer to a person who isn't considered 'neurotypical': 'neurovariant', 'neurodivergent', 'neurominority' and 'neurodistinct'.

4. Asperger's Syndrome

Some of those given an Asperger's diagnosis before its removal from diagnostic criteria (in 2013 in the DSM, and 2019 by the WHO), are understandably attached to their 'Aspie' identity. Going forward, all diagnoses will be for autism as a spectrum condition, without Asperger's being recognised separately.

5. Recognising the spiky profile, not 'high' or 'low' function.

The terms 'high' and 'low' functioning have been used to reflect perceptions of cognitive function and/or verbal communication skills. In fact, because autism is a spectrum, every individual has a 'spiky profile' of high and low function across their unique spread of traits. Those typically referred to as 'high functioning' have expressed frustration with the label, feeling that it fails to recognise the very real challenges they face on a daily basis, but which may be less visible to the outside world. The autistic community are generally happy simply to be called 'autistic'.

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