



# Key Terminology

## Let's talk about it

Understanding words like 'neurodiversity', 'neurodiverse', and 'neurodivergent' helps us communicate clearly and respectfully. Since using the wrong term causes confusion, it's helpful to learn the differences.

The term 'neurodiversity' describes the idea that everyone's brain is unique, encompassing all of humanity. You'll want to use it when talking about brain differences as a whole.

A 'neurodivergent' individual has a brain that processes information differently from what's considered typical. Always use this word as an adjective, meaning you should say 'a neurodivergent person' rather than 'a neurodivergent'.

A 'neurotypical' person possesses a brain that functions in a way that society considers standard. This is simply the correct term for anyone who isn't neurodivergent.

You should use 'neurodiverse' only when describing a group of people with a mix of different brain types, like a varied workforce. An entire team can be neurodiverse, but an individual person can't be.

The word 'neurotypes' refers to specific categories of brain function, which include autism, dyslexia, and typical development.

## Useful Links

[Cleveland Clinic - Neurodiversity](#)  
[Autism and neurodiversity](#)



# Puzzle Piece Symbol

## Let's talk about it

You've likely seen the puzzle piece used to represent autism. While common, it is highly controversial. Many in the autistic community view it as outdated or offensive. Understanding why helps you be a better ally. Here is a breakdown of the controversy:

It implies autistic people are a 'puzzle' to be solved or have a piece 'missing'. This frames autism as a problem rather than a different way of being

It was historically used by organisations focused on 'curing' autism. It represents an era where autistic people were talked about, not to

The primary colours reinforce the myth that autism is just for children. This erases the existence and needs of autistic adults

The community generally prefers the infinity symbol (rainbow for neurodiversity or golden for autism). We'll discuss this in a future highlight

Being mindful of imagery shows you are listening to the lived experiences of the community.

## Useful Links

[The Ableist History of the Puzzle Piece Symbol for Autism](#)  
[The History of the Puzzle Piece](#)



# Infinity Symbol

## Let's talk about it

If you've read the Puzzle Piece Symbol highlight, you might be wondering what symbol is preferred. The answer is (usually) the Infinity Symbol. It represents a spectrum of possibilities, rather than a linear scale. Here's a quick guide to the variations you might see:

The rainbow infinity symbol represents the neurodiversity movement as a whole. It includes everyone with different types of brains, such as ADHD, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, and Autism. The colours reflect the diversity of the human mind.

The gold infinity symbol is specific to Autism. The colour gold was chosen because 'Au' is the chemical symbol for gold. It's used to show that autistic people are valuable exactly as they are.

Unlike a puzzle, an infinity symbol has no beginning and no end. It implies a continuous journey and a life that is whole and complete. It rejects the idea that anyone is 'missing' something.

Adopting these symbols is a great way to show that you're up to date with the conversation and supportive of the neurodivergent community.

## Useful Links

[What is the Autism Infinity Symbol?](#)



# Masking

## Let's talk about it

Masking is when neurodivergent people hide their natural traits to fit in. It's often a constant performance to meet social expectations. It's like wearing a mask to hide things like stimming or social anxiety. Here are a few reasons why it's a challenge:

- It's incredibly draining to do this all day
- It'll often lead to burnout and exhaustion
- It's hard for others to see when someone's struggling
- It stops people from being their true selves

You can help to create a more inclusive space where everyone feels safe enough to take their mask off, whether they choose to or not:

- Don't judge habits like avoiding eye contact or fidgeting
- Focus on work quality rather than how someone is socialising when assessing their performance
- Make it okay for everyone to talk about their needs
- Respect that everyone has different ways of working

## Useful Links

[National Autistic Society: Masking](#)  
[Dropping the mask takes two](#)



# Meetings

## Let's talk about it

Standard meeting formats don't work for everyone, often creating significant barriers for neurodivergent individuals.

- A grid of faces, poor audio, and noisy environments can quickly cause sensory overload.
- Fast-paced discussions and vague rules make it difficult to keep up, which often leads to anxiety.
- Forcing people to keep their cameras on means they feel pressured to mask, causing immense exhaustion and focus fatigue.

Creating an inclusive meeting culture is essential for collaboration, and simple adjustments make a huge difference.

- Send a clear agenda 24 hours in advance, state the meeting goals, and make cameras completely optional.
- Normalise using the chat function, stick to scheduled times, and include breaks for sessions over an hour.
- Use the neuro-inclusive meeting guide and meeting invite template in the [Inclusion Toolkit](#).

## Useful Links

[Inclusion Toolkit](#)



# Neurospicy

## Let's talk about it

While the slang term 'neurospicy' is often used with good intentions, it can easily become a barrier to clear, respectful, and professional communication.

The word can trivialise real challenges, sound childish, and frustrate adults who want to be taken seriously at work.

It's an 'in-group' term that can feel empowering when used individually, but it often feels disrespectful when used by outsiders.

You should always follow a person's lead if they choose this label for themselves, but don't use it to describe colleagues or the wider community.

If you aren't neurodivergent yourself, it's best to stick to accurate terms like 'neurodivergent' to avoid causing unintended confusion or offence.

## Useful Links

[Is it OK to use the term 'neurospicy' when talking about autism and other neurodivergences?](#)



# Hidden Disabilities Sunflower

## Let's talk about it

You've probably seen green lanyards with yellow sunflowers in airports, shops, or even at the office. This is the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower. While not exclusive to neurodiversity, it's widely used by the community.

Here's what you need to know:

- It's a discreet way for people to choose to be visible about having a hidden disability. This includes autism, ADHD, anxiety, chronic pain, and many others.
- The wearer might need a little more time, patience, or assistance. It is a request for understanding, not a label of inability.
- You don't need to ask what their disability is. Just knowing they might need extra space or time is enough.
- If a colleague wears one (or uses a Sunflower background on calls), it's a helpful cue to be mindful of your communication and their environment.

It is a simple symbol that promotes kindness and patience without forcing anyone to disclose their private medical history.

## Useful Links

[The Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Scheme](#)  
[What is a hidden disability?](#)



# Superpowers Debate

## Let's talk about it

Calling neurodivergence a 'superpower' is usually well-intentioned, but the community has mixed feelings about it. While it's great to celebrate strengths, this phrasing can create unintended barriers.

It can hide the hard parts of daily life. Focusing only on special talents risks ignoring the practical support, adjustments, and accommodations that people actually need.

This label creates intense pressure to be amazing. People can feel like they have to be a genius or extraordinary just to be accepted by those around them.

The term doesn't fit everyone's experience. Many individuals view their neurodivergence as a disability rather than a special power, so don't force the label on them.

Always let the person decide how they want to describe themselves. It's much better to compliment specific skills, such as great focus, creative thinking, and problem solving.

It's vital to offer support regardless of performance. Ensure people feel valued for who they are, even on the days when they don't feel particularly spectacular.

## Useful Links

[From Deficit To Superpowers: Is It Ableist To Focus On Neurodivergent Strengths?](#)  
[Beyond Stigmas and Superpowers: A Balanced Neurodivergence Narrative](#)  
[Musing on ableism, neurodiversity, shame and superpowers](#)



# Tourette's Syndrome

## Let's talk about it

Tourette's Syndrome (or Tourette Syndrome, in more medical settings) is a condition that's often misunderstood. Many people think that it's just about swearing, but that's actually quite rare (it's called coprolalia). It's mostly about tics, which are sounds or movements that someone can't easily stop.

It's important to bear in mind that managing tics all day can be exhausting. Tics can increase when someone is stressed or tired, and trying to hide those tics can make it more difficult to focus. On top of this, other people can often be more judgmental when it comes to Tourette's, especially when they don't understand that it's not voluntary.

So how can you be a good ally to someone who has Tourette's Syndrome?

- Don't draw any attention to their tics
- Be patient if a tic happens during a conversation
- Focus on what the person is saying rather than the sounds
- Remember that tics are not a choice or a habit
- Be aware that they don't choose how their tics manifest

## Useful Links

[NHS: Tourette Syndrome Coprolalia](#)

# Body Doubling



## Let's talk about it

Body doubling is when you work alongside another person to help you focus. The other person doesn't need to be working on the same task as you. Their presence simply acts as an anchor to keep your mind from wandering, and keeps you on track. It's a popular strategy used by many neurodivergent people to tackle boring or difficult jobs, such as cleaning.

Body doubling lowers the mental barrier to getting started on a task. Having someone else in the room or on a video call creates a sense of accountability, stopping the feeling of isolation and reducing the urge to procrastinate.

You can try this with your colleagues by setting up quiet 'co-working' sessions. Just jump on a video call together, state your goals, and then get to work. You can also do this in the office by sitting near someone who's also trying to focus. It's all about sharing the same productive energy.

## Useful Links

[The ADHD Body Double: A Unique Tool for Getting Things Done](#)  
[ADHD Body Doubling](#)  
[Neurodiversity Cafe: Body Doubling](#)



# Spoon Theory

## Let's talk about it

Spoon theory is a way to explain living with limited energy. A writer named [Christine Miserandino](#) created it to describe chronic illness, but the neurodivergent community uses it a lot now.

Imagine you start the day with twelve spoons, but a colleague might start with twenty. Every single task costs spoons, like getting dressed or answering an email. However, a task that takes one spoon for you might take four spoons for someone else. Once you're out of spoons, you've got no energy left for anything else. You can sometimes borrow spoons from tomorrow if you really need to, but that leaves you at serious risk of burnout.

Spoon Theory shows how everyday tasks drain us differently. For neurodivergent people, things like sensory overload or masking can steal multiple spoons at once. The theory gives people a simple way to communicate when they've got nothing left to give.

Everyone should be able to manage their energy without shame. You can help support your team by respecting when a colleague says they're 'low on spoons'. It's also best to keep meetings short so you don't drain someone's entire supply. Please remember that energy levels change from day to day.

## Useful Links

[Spoon theory: Understanding energy for neurodivergent people](#)  
[Spoon Theory for Autism and ADHD: The Neurodivergent Spoon Drawer](#)  
[Energy accounting: a strategy for supporting wellbeing](#)