



About Us

Resources for Autism is a registered charity that for the last 23 years has provided practical support to individuals on the spectrum and those who love them and care for them. Our vision is to play a leading role in the achievement of a society where people on the autistic spectrum and their families and carers are valued and supported and can participate to their full potential as equal citizens. We walk our talk every day supporting thousands of individuals and their families every year.

What is Neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity simply means that there are a range of ways in which we learn, process information, and relate to others. First coined by an Autistic sociologist Judy Singer in the 1990s, the term neurodiversity was originally used within the Autistic community to reflect the idea that Autism is not a disorder but merely a different way of being.

Now the term neurodiversity is now being used in a wider sense not just Autism.

This includes:

ADHD Dyslexia, Dyscalculia, Dyspraxia and Tourette's syndrome.

Neurodiversity in the workplace

Neurodivergence is fairly common, so most workplaces are already neurodiverse. Yet, there is still a lack of understanding around most forms of neurodivergence, and misperceptions persist. As a result, in the workplace, people within these neurominorities have at best been included only within broader disability inclusion initiatives, where accommodations have often focused on the more visible challenges of physically disabled employees.ⁱ

With neurodiversity gaining recognition, many employers are starting to see the invaluable difference that employing neurodiverse people make and the competitive advantage it brings to companies.

For example:

Currently only 16% of people on the autistic spectrum are in some kind of full time paid employment yet many autistic people have incredible strengths that would add value to many industries and workplaces:

These include:

- Hyper focus and attention to detail
- Logical thinking
- Data Driven
- Analytical skills
- Great ability to assimilate and retain information
- Can express deep emotion and empathy, might just express these in a different way

Many organisations who are realising the competitive advantages gained by having employees who think differently, are running or developing neurodiverse work initiatives. These include Microsoft, JP Morgan, EY, Google, SAP, DXC, Technology, Ford and Amazon.

Many organisations in this area have demonstrated great successes. JPMorgan, for example, reports that 'after three to six months working in the Mortgage Banking Technology division, autistic workers were doing the work of people who took three years to ramp up – and were even 50 percent more productive'.¹

Entrepreneurs such as Richard Branson, have changed the discussion around neurodiversity by talking proudly of their neurodivergence, seeing it as a blessing. Branson claims that being dyslexic is an advantage that has helped him greatly. David Neeleman, the founder of Jet Blue Airways, emphasizes the benefits of ADHD has for his business and the creativity and the originality it can stimulate.

Legal Obligation and Disclosure

Being neurodivergent will usually amount to a **disability** under the Equality Act 2010. This means the organisation has a legal obligation to make reasonable adjustments to the workplace and the individual's role that will remove or minimise any disadvantage to them. Many performance issues are caused by neurodivergent employees not feeling safe to disclose it, trying to hide it and not asking for the adjustments or support they need. Reported reasons for not disclosing include:

¹ <https://www.jpmorganchase.com/news-stories/disability-as-an-asset-in-the-workplace>

- They may feel judged or feel like they are making excuses for their performance
- Treated differently to everyone else
- Patronised

If staff know that the organisation is dedicated to supporting neurodiversity, then they are more likely to disclose their neurodivergence at an early stage.

Having a workplace that is set up to proactively think about what can be done to support the needs of each employee can make it much easier to identify and implement adjustments for neurodivergent staff.

It is of course up to the individual if they want to disclose to their colleagues but in most cases, it will benefit the individual, improve understanding from colleagues and enrich the culture of the organisation.

Language and terminology regarding Neurodiversity

Definitions relating to Neurodiversity can be contentious. The language is relatively new and evolving.

'It's vital that we maintain some basic clarity and consistency of language, for the sake of effective communication among ourselves and with our broader audiences. Clarity of language supports clarity of understanding'.²

Language and terminology have had a huge influence on thoughts and opinions. Misuse of labelling can spread stereotyping and prejudice.

For example, Autism Spectrum Disorder is now being called Autism Spectrum Condition.

Language and terminology are a complex issue and really needs to be led by the neurodivergent person themselves. The individual should have the choice about how they want to define themselves to their colleagues. Some people do not want to be defined by their disability, as with others they see it very much part of them.

Neurodiversity advocate Nick Walker, has provided many accepted 'definitions' in the neurodiversity sphere in his influential bog, Neurocosmopolitanism.³

² <https://neurocosmopolitanism.com/neurodiversity-some-basic-terms-definitions/>

³ <https://neurocosmopolitanism.com/neurodiversity-some-basic-terms-definitions/>

Here are some useful definitions on language and neurodiversity:

<u>Language to avoid</u>	<u>Language to use</u>
(the) handicapped	disabled (people)
disorder	condition
aspie	autistic
“normal”	neurotypical

Useful terms to know:

Neurodiversity

The diversity of ways in which a group of human brains think, learn, relate to others and interpret the world.

What it doesn't mean:

Neurodiversity is a biological fact. It's not a perspective, an approach, a belief, a political position or paradigm or a movement.⁴

Neurodivergent

Having cognitive functioning different from what is demonstrated in the general population. It seems to be a term that most neurodivergent people are comfortable with.

Neurodivergence

Is the state of being neurodivergent. It's worth noting that a common misuse of language is to talk of 'an individual's neurodiversity' – better would be 'an individual's neurodivergence'.

Neurominority

A group that share a similar form of neurodivergence such as autistic people, or dyslexic people, defined by sharing a similar form of innate neurodivergence. There is invariably great variety within each neurominority demographic.

Neurodiverse Paradigm

This is a specific perspective or approach that entails the following principles.

⁴ <https://neurocosmopolitanism.com/neurodiversity-some-basic-terms-definitions/>

- Neurodiversity is a natural part of human variation to be expected and accepted as part of human diversity in general.
- The idea that there is one 'normal' or 'right' brain or mind is culturally constructed fiction. Just as much there is one 'normal' or 'right' ethnicity, gender, or culture.
- Social dynamics that manifest within neurodiversity include the dynamics of social power inequalities just as it does with diversity of ethnicity, gender or culture.

Neurotypical

A neurocognitive function that falls within expected societal standards. Neurotypical is the opposite of Neurodivergent.

Social mode of Disability

The social model of disability states that: 'Disability is caused by the way society is organised, rather than by a person's impairment or difference. It looks at ways of removing barriers that restrict life choices for disabled people. When barriers are removed, disabled people can be independent and equal in society, with choice and control over their own lives'.⁵

Myths

Neurodiversity is the new trend

Neurodiversity is a biological fact. A lot of scientific evidence shows considerable variation within the brain.

It's not an opinion or political position. Therefore, it's something that should be nurtured and embraced as intrinsic part of being human.

As an example, these are some of the most common myths that might affect an Autistic person in the workplace:

Autistic people are anti-social

Many Autistic people may find it difficult to relate other people at times. They may need support with social skills and interact differently with the world around them. However, most Autistic people want and enjoy having relationships.

⁵ <https://www.scope.org.uk/>

Autistic people all have super talents

Not all Autistic people are Rain man or Einstein. We all have strengths and weaknesses and need to be supported to do our best. All people should be given the opportunity to thrive in the workplace irrespective of their neurodivergence.

Autistic people can have specialised interests and skills, however this not always related to technical abilities. Many Autistic people are highly creative, imaginative and would be an asset to many creative industries. The saying reigns true, “when you have met one Autistic person, you’ve met one Autistic person”

Autism only affects males

In recent times, it has been recognised that just as many females might be affected by Autism. Females can mask their difficulties which makes it more difficult to spot. They learn skills to interact with the world better which means females are more likely to have later diagnosis in life. This can be true in other conditions such as ADHD.

Conclusion

Steve Silberman, author of *Neurotribes: the legacy of autism and the future of neurodiversity*, has told wired magazine that ‘honouring and nurturing neurodiversity is civilizations best chance to thrive in an uncertain future’. ⁶

Neurodiverse environmental activist Greta Thunberg is already an example of this.

Embracing neurodiversity within the world and especially within the workplace benefits us all.

⁶ <https://www.wired.com/author/steve-silberman/>