

Autism Language Guide

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Proof Positive is a leading non-profit organization dedicated to improving the well-being of autistic people and their families, providers, and their families. The following offers some guidance for language when writing and speaking about the autism community.

Avoid Using: high-functioning, low-functioning, mild, severe

- **Why:** These labels oversimplify the diverse experiences of people with autism and imply a misleading hierarchy within the spectrum. Autism is a spectrum with a wide range of experiences.

Avoid Using: Level 1 / 2 / 3 Autism

- **Why:** While these levels are part of the DSM-5's diagnostic criteria, using them can often reinforce stereotypes and imply a misleading hierarchy within the spectrum. Autism is a spectrum with a wide range of experiences.

Avoid Using: Suffers from autism, I'm sorry you have autism

- **Why:** These phrases imply that autism is inherently negative and something to be suffered from, which undermines the diverse experiences and perspectives of autistic individuals.

“autistic person” or “person with autism?”

- It depends. Language preference varies among individuals. Some prefer identity-first language (autistic person) as they see autism as an integral part of their identity, while others prefer person-first language (person with autism) to emphasize their personhood beyond their autism. It's ok to ask with care.

Use of these words are encouraged:

- **Neurodiversity:** A term that recognizes and respects the diversity of human brains and minds, emphasizing that neurological differences like autism are a natural and valuable part of human diversity.
- **Neurodivergent:** Used to describe individuals whose neurological development and functioning are atypical, often used in the context of Autism, ADHD, dyslexia, OCD, etc.
- **Unique Strengths/Skills:** Highlighting the unique strengths and skills of neurodivergent individuals, rather than focusing on challenges.
- **Access Needs:** Instead of focusing on deficits, honor individual access needs so that each Autistic person (and not) can fully partake. We all have access needs.
- **Communication Preferences:** Recognizing and accommodating each person's varied communication styles and preferences.

Gen-Z Slang: Neurospicy

- “Neurospicy” is another term for a neurodivergent individual or group of people. It was birthed primarily in the Gen-Z community and spread through social media as a way of adding fun to the topic of neurodivergence. Though popular, the term is not endorsed by all Gen-Z neurodivergent individuals.

An autistic may have language preferences outside of this guide.

Always ask and respect their preferences.

Please consult with us when in doubt; we welcome your engagement. (hello@proofpositive.org)