



## ☀️ Happy Chatters Guide to Neurodiversity-Affirming Language ☀️

At Happy Chatters, we believe in celebrating neurodiversity and supporting every child in their unique way of thinking, learning, and communicating. Using respectful and affirming language helps create a welcoming environment where all children and families feel understood and valued.

This guide explains key terms, preferred language, and why word choices matter when talking about autism, ADHD, communication, and support needs.

# What is Neurodiversity?

**Neurodiversity** includes everyone—all different types of brains! It acknowledges that neurology is a spectrum, meaning there are many natural variations in how brains function.

The rainbow infinity symbol () represents neurodiversity because it shows the full, diverse spectrum of neurological differences.

## Neurotypical vs. Neurodivergent

**Neurotypical:** Someone whose brain works in a way that fits easily within society's expectations.

**Neurodivergent:** Someone whose brain works differently, which may require different types of support.




Neurodivergence includes:

- ✓ **Autism**
- ✓ **ADHD**
- ✓ **Dyslexia**
- ✓ **Dyspraxia**
- ✓ **Tourette Syndrome**
- ✓ **Speech & Language Differences**

Neurodivergent people do not have a disorder—they simply have a different way of thinking and experiencing the world.

# Neuro-Affirming Language: What to Say & Why It Matters

Language is powerful, and the words we use shape how we view and support neurodivergent children. Here are some common phrases and better alternatives to ensure we use respectful and empowering language:

 <b>Instead of...</b>	 <b>Say this...</b>	 <b>Why?</b>
<b>Asperger's / Aspie</b>	Autistic	The term "Asperger's" is outdated and no longer used in diagnosis.
<b>Neurotypical vs. Normal</b>	Neurotypical vs. Neurodivergent	"Normal" suggests others are not normal —everyone's brain is different!
<b>Non-verbal</b>	Minimally speaking	Some children understand and communicate in other ways, even without spoken words.
<b>High/Low functioning labels</b>	Describe support needs (e.g., "needs high support in sensory environments")	"Functioning" labels are misleading abilities change daily and across environments.
<b>Challenging behaviour</b>	Dysregulation / Increased support needs	Behavior is communication! Instead of labelling it, identify the child's needs.
<b>ASD (autism spectrum disorder)</b>	Autistic / On the Autism Spectrum	Autism is not a disorder—it is a natural neurotype.

<b>Special needs</b>	Support needs	All children have needs—some just need different types of support.
<b>Meltdown / Tantrum</b>	Emotional overload / Sensory distress	A meltdown is not misbehaviour—it's a response to overwhelm.
<b>Deficits / Problems</b>	Differences / Challenges	These are not "problems"—they are variations in how a child experiences the world.
<b>Treatment / Intervention</b>	Support / Therapy	We support children rather than trying to "fix" them.
<b>Stimming (as a negative)</b>	Self-regulation / Sensory movement	Stimming helps children regulate emotions and feel safe.
<b>Selective Mutism</b>	Situationally non-speaking	Children communicate when they feel safe and supported.

## Communication & Gestalt Language Processing

At Happy Chatters, we support Gestalt Language Processing (GLP)—a way some children naturally learn language in phrases (chunks) before breaking them down into individual words.

- ◆ Some children echo phrases (echolalia)—this is a great starting point for communication!
- ◆ Using scripts, songs, and meaningful phrases helps them learn language naturally.
- ◆ AAC (Augmentative & Alternative Communication) supports spoken language, not replaces it.



**Every child communicates in their own way, and all communication is valid! ♥**

- ◆ Why We Use the Rainbow Infinity Symbol Instead of the Puzzle Piece
- ◆ The rainbow infinity symbol (∞ 🌈) represents the full spectrum of neurodiversity and celebrates the strengths and identities of neurodivergent individuals.
- ◆ The puzzle piece has historically been associated with organisations that portray autism as something to be "fixed" or "solved." Many autistic advocates find it harmful because it suggests they are "missing a piece" or incomplete.

**At Happy Chatters, we embrace the infinity symbol to reflect acceptance, inclusion, and the uniqueness of every child.**

### 💡 Supporting Your Child's Unique Journey

- ✓ Celebrate their strengths – Every child has unique talents, passions, and ways of learning.
- ✓ Create a supportive environment – Reduce sensory overload, offer breaks, and respect their needs.
- ✓ Respect their communication style – Whether they speak, sign, type, or use an AAC device, all communication is valid.
- ✓ Advocate for neuro-affirming support – Work with professionals who focus on supporting, not "fixing" your child.

**By using affirming language, we help children feel accepted, understood, and empowered to be their true selves. ♥ ✨**

✉ **Contact us at Happy Chatters**

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