

## Neurodiversity Glossery

The term 'neurodiversity' was introduced in the 1990s to reduce the stigma against people with autism, ADHD and learning disorders.

**Masking:** When a neurodivergent person 'masks' their true feelings, personality, mood or opinions in order to be accepted socially and to 'fly under the radar' to not be outed/seen as neurodivergent. It is a coping mechanism, generally as a result of Neurodivergent trauma from non-acceptance in society.

**Executive function:** A series of brain functions managed by the frontal lobe including memory, learning, decision making, organisation and time management.

**Meltdown/Shutdown:** When a neurodivergent person becomes overwhelmed or overstimulated and has an emotional outburst or becomes mute to regulate their emotions.

**Neurodivergent:** A neurotype which is not neurotypical and diverges from the average neurotype.

**Neurodiverse/Neurodiversity:** The wide range of neurotypes that exist in the world.

**Neurotypical:** describes a person who does not have a diagnosis of a neurodivergent condition and does not self-declare as being neurodivergent. Neurotypical is the opposite of neurodivergent.

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**Neurotype:** The type of brain a person has.

**Self-stimulation/stimming:** Activities carried out by neurodivergent people to soothe or calm themselves to regulate and stabilise their emotions and nervous system. These activities can involve flapping, dancing, making noises, humming, movement and sound of any kind.

**Sensory Overload/Burnout:** Many people who are neurodivergent have sensory issues or sensory processing disorders, which can make life overwhelming. This can be anything visually, physically, auditorily and so on.

**Hypersensitivity:** Heightened awareness and discomfort caused by sensory, physical or emotional inputs that others might not notice.

**Hyposensitivity:** A decreased awareness of sensory, physical or emotional inputs.

## ADHD

ADHD stands for 'attention deficit hyperactive disorder'. There are three sub-types of ADHD.

1. Inattention – you may be easily distracted, disorganised and struggle to focus on a task for very long.
2. Hyperactive-impulsive – you may be restless, find it hard to stay sitting down, and make decisions without considering the consequences. Combined – this is where you experience both inattention and hyperactive-impulsivity.

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Symptoms of ADHD can vary between each person and may change over time.

ADHD is common, affecting around 200,000 to 300,000 adults in the UK. This number is estimated to be higher in children. It's diagnosed through an assessment by a psychiatrist, psychologist, or ADHD specialist nurse.

Treatment includes medication to increase focus, and therapy to manage any difficult thoughts and behaviours.

## **Autism spectrum disorder (ASD)**

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) affects how people behave, interact, and communicate with others. Symptoms usually develop in the first two years of life. Below are some key signs of ASD.

- Difficulty with social interaction and communication:
  - finding it hard to maintain eye contact
  - not responding or being slow to respond to others, for example someone saying your name
  - talking for a long time about a special interest
  - difficulty picking up on social cues
  - difficulty understanding other's feelings or point of view
- Repetitive behaviours and/or restricted interests:
  - repeating certain words or behaviours
  - having intense interests in specific topics, such as certain objects or facts

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- being upset by a change in routine
- being sensitive to light, sound, or temperature

ASD can affect people differently. It may make some aspects of daily life challenging.

Treatment focuses on building skills such as social interaction and independent living.

Living with Autism can have many strengths. These include the ability to hyper-focus on a task, a good memory and attention to detail. This can increase productivity, such as in the workplace.

## Dyslexia

Dyslexia is a learning difficulty that can affect someone's ability to read, write and process information. It can also impact organisation skills and memory. The cause of dyslexia is unknown, but it often runs in families.

Each person with dyslexia may have different strengths and weaknesses. But some common signs include:

- confusing similar words, such as 'cat' and 'cot'
- difficulty spelling words correctly
- reading or writing slowly
- difficulty listening and focusing
- having to re-read information to understand it
- difficulty organising your thoughts

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Dyslexia can make certain tasks difficult. But many dyslexic people show strengths in visual and creative fields.

## **Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD)**

Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) affects around 12 in every 1,000 people in the UK.

The main signs of OCD include the following.

- Obsessive, persistent thoughts or urges – these can be intrusive (happen suddenly without us wanting them to). They can also cause anxiety. You may worry about something bad happening to you or others.
- Repetitive behaviours, also known as ‘compulsions’ – these are often done to reduce anxiety caused by the obsessive thoughts. Examples of compulsions include repetitive hand washing, checking locks or switches, or counting.

The symptoms of OCD are usually time-consuming and interfere with daily functioning.

OCD is diagnosed using a structured interview or a self-report test. Treatment for OCD includes certain types of antidepressant medication and cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT). But many people don't respond to treatment.

OCD is classed as a mental health condition. But recent research suggests that OCD may be a neurological disorder, as the brain and nervous system is affected. And so, we may consider it a neurodiversity term.

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## Tourette's and tic disorders

Tourette's syndrome is a condition affecting the development of the brain. People with Tourette's experience 'tics'. These are sudden, involuntary movements or speech.

Tics can be divided into motor tics (affecting movement) or vocal tics (affecting speech).

Motor tics - Symptoms of motor tics include:

- blinking
- head jerking
- grimacing
- imitating gestures
- Vocal tics

Symptoms of vocal tics include:

- coughing or grunting
- screaming
- repeating words
- swearing

The exact cause of Tourette's syndrome is unknown, but it can run in families. Tics can often be triggered or made worse by stress and anxiety. Many people learn to live with their tics, and they don't always need treatment. But cognitive behavioural therapy for tics (CBIT) can be used to help you relax and manage your tics.