

## #ActuallyAutistic vocabulary words and terms you should know!

There is a lot of confusion about & misuse of words related to autism and neurodivergence, so hopefully this list clears some things up :)

**Neurodiversity Paradigm:** a critical social theory that began in the autism rights movement, which states that neurological variation is a natural part of human diversity, and that people of all neurotypes should be valued and accommodated in society.

**Neurotype:** the way someone's brain is wired, often analogous to a person's diagnosis or lack thereof. For example, "autistic" is a neurotype, and so is "neurotypical."

**Neurodiverse:** used to describe a *group* of people who have *different* neurotypes. For example, you could use the word "neurodiverse" to refer to a group of people that includes autistic people, neurotypical people, ADHD people, etc.

**Neurodivergent:** a person whose neurology/brain wiring is substantially different from the norm. This word is usually used in reference to people with developmental and learning disabilities. It includes autistic people and "Autistic Cousins."

**Neurotypical:** a term that originated in the autistic community, which refers to a person with typical neurology; someone who does not have a developmental or learning disability; someone who is not autistic or an Autistic Cousin.

**Autistic Cousin (AC):** non-autistic neurodivergent people, who have conditions that often include some autistic traits. ACs include people with ADHD, Sensory Processing Disorder, Tourette's, Dyslexia, Schizoaffective Disorder, etc.

**Allistic:** any non-autistic person. This includes both neurotypical people, and non-autistic neurodivergent people (ACs).

**Stimming:** short for self-stimulatory behavior; repetitive motions or actions that autistic people frequently do to regulate sensory and emotional input. Examples include hand flapping, rocking, chewing, jumping, etc.

**Special Interest (SI, SpIn):** an autism-specific term that refers to an autistic person's passionate interest in a certain topic or activity, something they are extremely invested in and knowledgeable about. These interests are much more intense than neurotypical people's interests.

**Hyperfixation:** a term used to refer to a topic or activity that a neurodivergent person is currently extremely focused on, often causing us to forget to do certain basic necessities like bathe and eat. Autistic people, ADHD people, and some other neurodivergent people

experience hyperfixations. Autistic people's hyperfixations are often our special interests. This word can also be used as a synonym for hyperfocus, in the forms "hyperfixate" and "hyperfixating."

**Hyperfocus:** the state of being extremely focused on a hyperfixation. This is the time blind mental state that neurodivergent people enter when we become fixated on a thought, topic, interest, or activity.

**Meltdown:** an emotional "explosion" in an autistic person, caused by sensory and/or emotional overstimulation. Meltdowns can involve crying, screaming, arguing, yelling, and aggressive and/or self-injurious behavior. Sometimes, autistic people can have more subtle versions of meltdowns that look more like panic attacks.

**Shutdown:** an emotional "implosion" in an autistic person, caused by sensory and/or emotional overstimulation. Shutdowns can involve crying, being unable to speak ("going nonverbal"), becoming stiff and immobile, and trying to hide.

**Autistic Burnout:** a long-term, chronic state of executive dysfunction and sensory/emotional dysregulation. Burnout can be caused when an autistic person is in an environment that doesn't meet their needs. Symptoms of burnout include lethargy, frequent nonverbal episodes, deteriorating personal hygiene, and an inability to do basic tasks that the person was once able to do.

**A\$:** a tongue in cheek acronym that stands for Autism Speaks, which is an organization that funds research into genetic causes and "treatments" for autism. They claim to represent autistic people, but there is only one autistic person on their board of directors, and they have repeatedly refused to listen to the needs of autistic people who reach out to them. They use fearmongering tactics to earn money, but almost none of that money goes towards directly helping autistic people and our families.

**/s:** this is short for /sarcasm, which is a common courtesy used between autistic people communicating online, to make it easier to understand when someone is being sarcastic. It is usually placed after the last word in a sentence. For example: *wow, that lecture was sooo informative! /s*

**/j:** this is short for /joke, which is also a common courtesy used between autistic people communicating online. It makes it easier to tell when someone is joking, as opposed to being serious. It's used in the same way as /s.

**Identity First Language:** this is the term used to describe autistic people's preference for being referred to as "autistic" rather than "people with autism." This is because autism can't be separated from who we are, and it's not a bad thing, so we don't want to be separated from it. We're autistic, and proud!

**ABA:** stands for Applied Behavioral Analysis. It's a branch of behavioral therapy that aims to change autistic people's behavior through a system of regimented rewards and punishments. It was founded by the same man who pioneered gay conversion therapy, Ivar Lovaas. ABA is fundamentally coercive and abusive, even in its most watered-down forms. Many autistic people who have gone through ABA now have PTSD.

**Masking:** learned behavior that an autistic person employs to disguise the fact that they're autistic; when an autistic person acts neurotypical in front of other people. Long-term masking can be harmful to an autistic person's mental health.

**Nonspeaking:** this is a word used to refer to anyone who is either unable to, or very infrequently able to, use their mouth and voice box to produce speech that communicates their thoughts. Around 1/3 of all autistic people are nonspeaking.

**AAC:** short for Augmentative and Alternative Communication. This term refers to any system or method of communication that is not sign language or spoken language. It may refer to the use of a tablet, keyboard, picture exchange system, or any number of other methods.

That's all I can think of for now. What would you add?

~Eden 🐸