

**Alexithymia:** difficulties identifying, understanding and expressing your emotions or those of others.

**Autism:** there is no single definition of 'autism' and seeking to define it as a 'thing' is what the medical model and pathology paradigm aims to do. Instead, it can be much more helpful and accurate to focus on what 'being Autistic' means to each person.

Autistic people are a minority group who experience and respond to the world differently to non-autistic people and tend to share a lot of those experiences with one another.

This might include: social interaction, communication and sensory and cognitive processing.

Autistic experiences and needs are fluid and will change depending on the impact of the environment and other people.

Autistic people will also experience and respond to the world according to their unique, intersectional identity too.

There is no single way to 'be Autistic' as there is no single way to 'be human'.

**Autistic Burnout:** a period of intense sensory, social, emotional and physical overwhelm which results in exhaustion and difficulties with executive functioning, memory, attention, and a change of capacity to communicate and regulate sensory input. It is brought on by long periods of unmet needs. Autistic burnout can lead to anxiety, depression and other mental health difficulties.

**Executive Functioning:** skills that include the ability to manage yourself, plan, organise and carry out tasks to achieve a intended outcome.

**Hypersensitivity:** an intense / heightened response to sensory stimuli, to the point it could feel painful or very uncomfortable (e.g., light/sound/taste/taste/touch /smell/movement).\*

**Hyposensitivity:** a lower response to sensory stimuli, to the point of being unaware for some people (e.g., light /sound/taste/touch/smell/movement).\*

\*Take care with both these terms though as they can suggest there is a 'right' or 'correct' way to respond to the sensory world and that the Autistic person's response is somehow faulty. The use of this language may evolve over time, therefore.

**Info-dumping:** an extended monologue often related to the Autistic person sharing their deep knowledge and enthusiasm for their special interest(s).

**Interoception:** relates to a person's ability to understand and interpret internal body signals and sensations. If you have difficulties with interoceptive awareness, you may not know if you are hungry, thirsty, hot, cold, need the toilet, or in pain.

**Intersectionality:** Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, the term *intersectionality* conceptualises how an individual's various identities 'intersect' to create unique experiences of oppression or privilege. Here is a great article to dive deeper: [Why Intersectionality is Important in Understanding Autism – Emergent Divergence](#).

**Masking:** the act of consciously or unconsciously suppressing one's authentic Autistic identity and needs in an attempt to fit into the social norms of the people around you. Masking is detrimental to mental health over a long period of time. It is important to acknowledge that some Autistic people have to mask for safety.

**Meltdown:** a nervous-system response to experiencing more than a person can manage. It can look similar to a 'tantrum' or 'losing control'. If an Autistic person is experiencing a meltdown, they will need time to rest, regulate and recover in a way that is right for them.

**Monotropism:** "a neurodiversity affirming theory of autism" (Murray et al., 2005). Autistic /ADHD/ AuDHD people are more likely to be monotropic (Garau et al., 2023). Monotropic people have an interest based nervous system. This means they focus more of their attention resources on fewer things at any one time compared to other people who may be polytropic. Things outside an attention tunnel may get missed and moving between attention tunnels can be difficult and take a lot of energy. Monotropism can have a positive and negative impact on sensory, social and communication needs depending on the environment, support provided and how a person manages their mind and body". (Community Definition of Monotropism collated by Helen Edgar, 2024)

**Neurodiverse:** the world is 'neurodiverse'; an individual cannot be.

**Neurodiversity:** neurodiversity is natural and valuable. When we use the term ‘neurodiversity’, we refer to the diversity of human brains and minds and recognises everybody’s differences in a value-neutral way: “diversity of human minds, the infinite variation in neurocognitive functioning within our species”. Neurodiversity itself it just biological fact! (Walker, 2021)

- Read more about the origin of neurodiversity as a concept here: *The neurodiversity concept was developed collectively: An overdue correction on the origins of neurodiversity theory* – Monique Botha, Robert Chapman, Morénike Giwa Onaiwu, Steven K Kapp, Abs Stannard Ashley, Nick Walker, 2024
- See more here: Walker, 2014: <https://neuroqueer.com/neurodiversity-terms-and-definitions> and work by Lived Experience Educator, Sonny Jane Wise.

**Neurodivergent:** an individual is ‘neurodivergent’ if they diverge from the dominant societal standards of ‘normal’ (Asasumasu, 2000s; Walker, 2021). Some people may describe themselves as multiply neurodivergent, e.g., Autistic, ADHD and OCD. The term ‘neurodivergent’ was never intended to be anything other than value-neutral term. It is important it is not used as a synonym for Autistic / ADHD.\*

*\*A note on GROVE’s use of ‘neurodivergent’:* As mentioned, ‘neurodivergent’ isn’t a synonym for being Autistic and ADHD despite often being used that way. GROVE currently works with Autistic young people, but we don’t use ‘neurodivergent’ to replace this – we are just a fledgling organisation with big hopes to expand to support otherwise neurodivergent young people. If we get to a point of deciding that our focus will remain solely on Autistic young people, then we will change our name to reflect this.

**Neurodiversity Paradigm:** the neurodiversity paradigm gives us a perspective, framework or model with which to really understand the principles of neurodiversity – foundations from which we can grow in any combination of understanding, knowledge or practice. It gives us reason and a way to reject the pathology paradigm (read more about what the pathology paradigm means [here](#)).

It is important to note that neurodiversity paradigm doesn’t invalidate the very real disablement and difficulty that can arise from being Autistic – either from living in a predominantly non-autistic world (which if you are interested in understanding disability models more would be the social model) or indeed from the combination of that and the person experience depending on the perspective on the Autistic person (you could look to the social-relational model to understand this more). And it certainly isn’t about denying support – quite the opposite in fact. It necessitates very careful examination of how belief, structures and practice in environments actively disable neurodivergent people and highlights that society has a responsibility for changing that rather than changing the person. Additionally, it isn’t about accepting everything that is written in diagnostic manuals and adding in some ‘strengths’, rather it is about a fundamental shift in perspectives and practice. It stops any possibility of framing people who require support as inherently wrong (Wise, 2023).

The neurodiversity paradigm crucially acknowledges “the **social dynamics** that manifest in regard to neurodiversity are similar to the social dynamics that manifest in regard to other forms of human diversity (e.g., diversity of ethnicity, gender, or culture). These dynamics include the dynamics of social power inequalities, and also the dynamics by which diversity, when embraced, acts as a source of creative potential.” (Walker, 2021)

See Nick Walker’s work for further detail.

**Neurodiversity Movement:** social justice movement driving forward the ethos of the neurodiversity paradigm.

**Neurotypical:** often used to describe people that are not neurodivergent. Alternative terms are **neuro-majority** and also **predominant neurotype** / ‘PNT’ as coined by Luke Beardon.

**Neurodiversity-affirming:** full commitment to the ideas underpinned by the neurodiversity paradigm and actions of the neurodiversity movement.

**PDA:** Pathological Demand Avoidance or some prefer Pervasive Drive for Autonomy (coined by Tomlin Wildling), PDA is widely understood to be a profile of autism, “involving the avoidance of everyday demands and the use of social strategies as part of this avoidance. PDA individuals share Autistic characteristics and also have many of the ‘key features’ of a PDA profile”. (PDA Society definition).

**Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria (RSD):** refers to an intense emotional response related to actual or perceived rejection and heightened sensitivity to criticism / any negative reaction.

**Sensory Overload:** the feeling of overwhelm due to sensory input, which outweighs what the mind and body are capable of processing at that moment. It can lead to burnout, meltdowns and shutdowns and takes time to recover from.

**Sensory Avoidance:** intentionally withdrawing from sensory experiences that don’t make the person feel good or is uncomfortable / painful.

**Sensory Seeking:** intentionally seeking sensory experiences that are pleasant / make the person feel good.

**Situational Mutism:** a person’s inability to produce speech in certain contexts.

**Shutdown:** a response to stress, sensory, social, or communication overload that may result in a person’s inability to communicate, engage in activities, or complete executive function tasks. The senses may be heightened or lowered.

**Special interest or ‘SPIN’:** some prefer ‘passionate or dedicated interest’ – whichever we use, for Autistic person interests can bring great joy and be the source of monotropic flow states (single channels of thought, which is a natural state for an Autistic mind). Engaging in interests provides opportunities for Autistic people to regulate, gain deep knowledge or skills in a certain activity/topic and can be a good opportunity to socialise and communicate with others who may share the same interest.

**Stimming:** repetitive behaviours and activities that help to regulate the mind and body.