

The A to Z of Being Neurodivergent

*Your spicy guide to self-advocacy,
language, and lived experience.*

Spicy
by
Design.

**ACCESS
BLISS.**

THE A TO Z OF BEING NEURODIVERGENT

Your spicy guide to self-advocacy, language, and lived experience. Whether you're trying to explain your brain to a boss, decode your diagnosis, or just find the words for what you feel — this is for you.

A – ACCESS NEEDS

Not everyone has the same starting point. Access needs are the supports a person requires to engage fully — at work, school, events, or even at home. It could be:

- Needing subtitles for auditory processing
- Using fidgets to concentrate
- Taking written instructions over verbal ones

👉 It's not about "special treatment." It's about equal access to the game.

B – BURNOUT (NEURODIVERGENT)

This isn't the same as being tired after a long week. Neurodivergent burnout can be:

- Cognitive and emotional exhaustion from constant masking
- Shutdowns that last days, weeks, or longer
- A total drop in executive functioning

Often misdiagnosed as depression. Often ignored.
But very, very real.

C – CO-OCCURRING CONDITIONS

Neurodivergent folks often hold multiple identities. It's common to experience more than one of the following:

- Autism
- ADHD
- Dyslexia
- OCD
- Chronic pain or illness
- Anxiety disorders

You're not a walking checklist — you're a multidimensional masterpiece.

THE A TO Z OF BEING NEURODIVERGENT

D – DOPAMINE

The brain's reward system runs on dopamine. For ADHDers especially, dopamine regulation is unpredictable. That's why:

- We procrastinate on tasks we know are important
- We hyperfocus on things that spark joy
- Mundane tasks feel literally painful

This isn't a moral failing. It's brain chemistry.

E – EXECUTIVE DYSFUNCTION

Wanting to do the thing — needing to do the thing — but still not doing the thing. It's like:

- Mentally yelling “Just stand up!” and staying frozen
- Leaving a form half-filled for 3 weeks
- Eating toast for dinner for the fifth night in a row because “real food” is just... too much

It's not about effort. It's about function.

F - FIDGETS

They regulate us. They soothe us. They help us think.

Fidgets are tools — not toys — that keep our sensory system balanced. For example:

- Tapping a pen during a meeting
- Playing with putty while processing conversation
- Pacing while talking on the phone

Let us stim in peace.

THE A TO Z OF BEING NEURODIVERGENT

G – GASLIGHTING (MEDICAL & INSTITUTIONAL)

“You don’t look autistic.”

“Everyone’s a little ADHD these days.”

“You’re just anxious.”

Many neurodivergent people experience medical gaslighting — being dismissed, doubted, or delayed in care due to internalised ableism and outdated stereotypes. The result? Misdiagnosis, trauma, and a whole lot of mistrust.

H – HYPERFOCUS

When the world disappears and only the thing exists. It can feel amazing — or dangerous. Common examples:

- Editing a video for 9 hours straight with no breaks
- Writing 6,000 words at 3am
- Getting completely absorbed in a new interest or task

It’s not laziness. It’s just that interest-based attention systems work... differently.

I – INVALIDATION

This happens when someone undermines your reality. It might sound like:

- “You’re just being dramatic.”
- “Are you sure it’s not just stress?”
- “You’re too high-functioning to need help.”

Invisible disabilities are still disabilities. And self-knowledge is still knowledge.

THE A TO Z OF BEING NEURODIVERGENT

J – JUDGEMENT-FREE ZONES

We need spaces to stim, cry, talk too much, not talk at all, repeat ourselves, fidget, or leave early. No explanation required. No weird looks.

Creating truly inclusive environments means letting people exist without constantly being corrected, watched, or silenced.

K – KINETIC LEARNING

Many of us learn by doing — through movement, repetition, touch, and physical space.

Examples:

- Building a model while learning geometry
- Roleplaying a script to memorise it
- Walking while brainstorming ideas

Classrooms and workplaces should make space for body-based learning — not just sit-down-and-stare formats.

L – LATE DIAGNOSIS

Many neurodivergent adults, especially women, nonbinary people, and people of colour, receive diagnoses later in life — or never at all. Why?

- Stereotypes about who “looks” autistic or ADHD
- Medical gatekeeping
- The impact of masking

Late doesn’t mean fake. Your timeline is valid.

THE A TO Z OF BEING NEURODIVERGENT

M – MASKING

Performing neurotypical behaviour to stay safe or “fit in.” It includes:

- Forcing eye contact
- Rehearsing conversations
- Suppressing stimming
- Hiding overwhelm or distress

It’s survival. But it’s also exhausting. And it can delay diagnosis, increase burnout, and disconnect us from ourselves.

N – NEURODIVERGENCE

A term coined by Kassiane Asasumasu, describing brains that diverge from neurotypical functioning. This includes:

- Autism
- ADHD
- Tourette’s
- OCD
- Dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia

It’s not about deficit. It’s about difference.

O – OVERSTIMULATION

Too much input — light, sound, smell, emotion, social cues — crashing into your nervous system all at once. It can cause:

- Meltdowns or shutdowns
- Anxiety or panic
- Physical pain or nausea

Your “background noise” might be someone else’s emergency. Please believe us when we need to leave.

THE A TO Z OF BEING NEURODIVERGENT

P – PROCESSING TIME

Not everyone responds immediately — and that's okay. For many neurodivergent people, extra seconds (or minutes) are needed to:

- Understand a question
- Translate thoughts into speech
- React emotionally

Silence doesn't mean confusion. Slowness doesn't mean incompetence.

Q – QUIET ROOMS

A basic accessibility tool in events and workplaces. A space where people can:

- Regulate after overstimulation
- Avoid social interaction
- Recover from sensory crashes

If you want true inclusion, start with somewhere we can rest.

R – REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS

Legal term for changes employers or institutions must make to remove barriers for disabled people. This might include:

- Flexible hours
- Written instructions
- Working from home
- Adjusted lighting or noise levels

And guess what? They help neurotypical people too.

THE A TO Z OF BEING NEURODIVERGENT

S – STIMMING

Short for self-stimulatory behaviour. Stimming helps regulate sensory overload, express emotion, or feel grounded. Examples:

- Rocking, hand-flapping, repeating phrases
- Humming, tapping, fidgeting
- Repeating a favourite sound or word

Suppressing stimming can lead to shutdowns. Let us stim.

T – TICS

Sudden, involuntary movements or sounds — like blinking, throat-clearing, or repeating words. Often linked to:

- Tourette's
- OCD
- Anxiety

Tics can be worsened by stress, masking, or being forced to suppress them.

U – UNMASKING

The process of letting your real self show — speaking, moving, and living in ways that feel natural to you.

Unmasking might look like:

- Using a mobility aid without shame
- Asking for time to process
- Wearing headphones in public
- Leaving a toxic job

Unmasking isn't easy. But it's powerful.

THE A TO Z OF BEING NEURODIVERGENT

V – VALIDATION

Being seen and believed. Hearing:

- “That makes sense.”
- “You’re not overreacting.”
- “Your needs are real.”

Validation is a human right — especially for those of us told we were “too much” for too long.

W -WORKING MEMORY

Short-term brain storage — often affected in ADHD, autism, and other conditions. Struggles include:

- Forgetting what you were saying mid-sentence
- Losing track of instructions
- Forgetting steps in tasks

It’s not about being careless. It’s about capacity.

X – XENON LIGHTS (AND OTHER SENSORY HELLHOLES)

Think: bright fluorescent lights, noisy hand dryers, scratchy uniforms, perfumed soaps. For some neurodivergent people, these environments aren’t annoying — they’re intolerable.

Sensory-friendly design isn’t luxury. It’s access

THE A TO Z OF BEING NEURODIVERGENT

Y – YOU'RE NOT FAKING IT

Whether you're self-diagnosed, undiagnosed, or still exploring, your experience is valid. Neurodivergence doesn't require permission. You don't need to "prove" anything.

You are not imagining it. You are not broken. You belong.

Z – ZONING OUT

Sometimes mistaken for boredom, zoning out can be:

- A trauma response
- Sensory overload
- Mental shutdown
- A freeze in executive function

Don't judge. Don't interrupt. Offer kindness — and a break if needed.

Being neurodivergent means navigating a world that often wasn't built with us in mind. This A–Z is a toolbox, a love letter, and a permission slip. Use it to explain yourself. Use it to validate others. Use it to change the conversation.