

What language to use?

Acceptable terms

- In English, autistic adults often choose the term "autistic person" to indicate that their autism is an essential property and not separable from their personhood.
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, in contrast, utilises person-first language throughout – “persons with autism”.
- In general, the most preferred term amongst autistic adults, families and professionals is “people on the autism spectrum”.

All three of the above terms are acceptable and will be used interchangeably in this document.

NOTE: Autism without accompanying intellectual disability and functional language impairment used to be called Asperger's syndrome and some people may still choose to refer to themselves as having Asperger's. Even if an individual chooses to say they have Asperger's syndrome, it still means they are autistic. It also does not necessarily equal having mild difficulties or that they are “a socially awkward genius” (common stereotype).

Terms to avoid

✗ Avoid saying that an individual “suffers from autism” or “is a victim of autism”. Consider using the following expressions instead:

- is autistic;
- is on the autism spectrum;
- has autism / an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) / an autism spectrum condition (ASC); in non-medical contexts, you may prefer to use the term “autism spectrum condition” because it avoids the negative connotations of “disorder”.

✗ Don't say “autism is an illness”. Consider using the following instead:

- autism is a disability;
- autism is a condition.

✗ Don't use the phrase “normally developing children/adults”. Consider using the following terms instead:

- neurotypical;
- typically developing children/adults.

✗ Avoid terms such as “high-functioning autism” and “low-functioning autism”. The autistic community widely agrees that these terms do not accurately represent the autism spectrum. Historically, autistic people without intellectual disability were called “high-functioning”, but having average or above average intelligence, in fact, does not mean that the person is not severely impaired in other areas and can function well in society. Referring to people as “high-

PERSPECTIVE

functioning” often means denying them the help and support that they need. In contrast, the term “low-functioning” devalues autistic people with more struggles and denies them opportunities. Consider using these terms instead:

- autistic people with low support needs;
- autistic people with moderate support needs;
- autistic people with high support needs.

✘ Similarly, the terms "severe autism" or "mild autism" should be avoided. It may be that the person's strengths are overshadowed by their difficulties, or perhaps the person's difficulties are overlooked.