

Neurodiversity 101: Part 1

Dimensional not Categorical

This web series aims to introduce you to the concept of neurodiversity and to explain some of the key facts surrounding neurodiversity.

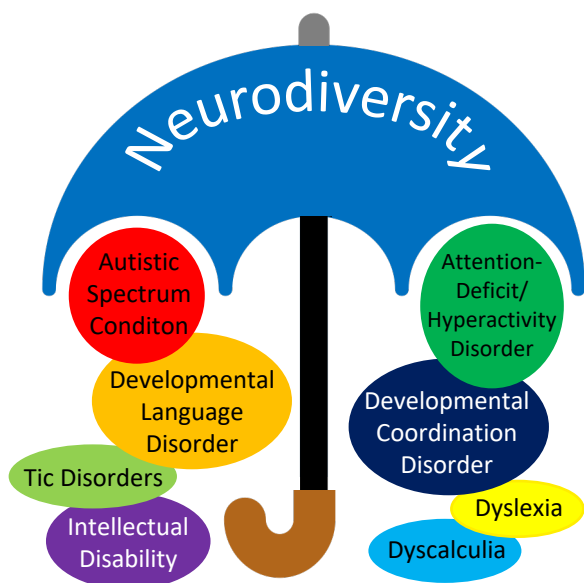
What is neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity is a fairly new term. It recognises the fact that our brains (neuro-) naturally vary from person to person (are diverse). It moves away from medical words such as 'disorder', 'disability' and 'difficulty'. Instead of just looking at what someone struggles with, it encourages us to think about them as a whole. What are they good at? What do they need support with?

What conditions are included in neurodiversity?

First, let's get one thing straight: neurodiversity is not just another word for Autism or Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC).

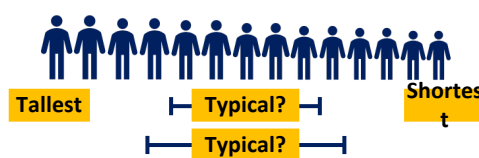
Although people on the Autism Spectrum are generally considered to be neurodiverse, lots of other conditions also come under the neurodiversity umbrella. These conditions are sometimes referred to as Neurodevelopmental Disorders (NDDs).



What do we mean when we say that neurodiversity is dimensional not categorical?

Some features of humans are **categorical**: they fit into neat 'boxes' or categories. For example, your blood type can be categorised as A, B, AB or O. There are no other blood types and you can't be half-way between Type A and Type O (or any of the others).

Other features of humans are **dimensional**: they do not fit into neat boxes. Instead, people sit somewhere on a scale or **spectrum** for that feature. For example, some people are shorter than others. There is a spectrum of height. However, whilst it's easy to pick out the tallest and the shortest people, it's hard to say exactly where the dividing line is between being short and being 'typical' height or between being 'typical' height and being tall.



Neurodiversity is like height. It is dimensional. Therefore, some people will have many symptoms of a condition and/or will have very severe symptoms. Others will have fewer and/or more mild symptoms. Others will have very few or no symptoms. Some will have more than one area of challenge or strength.

Whilst it's easy to classify people at each end of the neurodiversity spectrum, there is a grey area in between as there is no clear cut-off between 'neurodiverse with very mild symptoms' and 'neurotypical with some traits of neurodiversity'.