

Neurodiversity 101: Part 4

To Label or Not to Label?

The great labelling debate

There is a lot of **discussion** and **controversy** regarding 'labels' in neurodiversity (and beyond – this debate also occurs regarding ethnicity/race, gender and sexuality). Some people are adamantly against labelling people with terms such as Autism Spectrum Disorder. Other people vigorously defend their use of these labels.

Why do we label?

Categorising seems to be part of the human condition. Humans love to categorise things. For example:

- Plants and animals (categorised by shape, size, colour, geographic location, ability to interbreed and (more recently) genetics).
- Countries (categorised by location, climate, economic output, etc.).
- Food (categorised by ingredients (e.g. vegetarian or not), spiciness or even appropriateness for certain holidays).

It seems inevitable that we also categorise people.

It's important to note that **we use labels for a reason**. Labels give us a 'short-hand' to understanding something. This is important as it's literally impossible to consider all information about everything all the time. However, labels become problematic when they start interfering with our ability to understand things.

Labels have **advantages and disadvantages**. Whether they are worthwhile will depend on which of these advantages and disadvantages are relevant for the person in question.

In any case, it's important to remember that **labels only tell you broadly about a group, not specifically about a person**. If we are to deliver support using a person-centred approach, labels can only ever be a starting point to understanding how to help a person.

