Victorian Public Sector Commission

VICTORIA State Government

About neurodiversity

A brief introduction to the concept of neurodiversity.

Language in this toolkit

Language about neurodiversity continues to change. The language we used in this toolkit was appropriate when we wrote it.

Some employees may have different ways of describing themselves than the ways we have included in this toolkit.

Neurodiversity and neurodivergent

The term 'neurodiversity' describes the idea that in society:

- humans have a range of different brains and there is no 'right' brain
- each human is unique and that society is 'neurodiverse'.

Some people use the term 'neurotypes' to refer to the different types of brains that make up a neurodiverse society.

The term 'neurodivergent' refers to a person with a neurotype that is in the minority. This means their brain is different to that of most other people.

There is no official list of identities or conditions where a person can be referred to as neurodivergent.

In this toolkit, we use the term neurodivergent to refer to the following:

- Autism

- ADHD
- Dyslexia
- Dyscalculia
- Dysgraphia
- Dyspraxia.

People have different opinions on what they think should be included under the umbrella term ‘neurodivergent’.

People with one or more of these identities or conditions may call themselves a ‘neurodivergent person’. Others may not use the term neurodivergent and may simply refer to themselves with a different word, such as ‘dyslexic’ or ‘dyspraxic’.

We have included brief information about each of these. Our descriptions are a guide only, as each neurodivergent person has unique experiences, strengths and challenges.

Autism

Compared to non-autistic people, autistic people experience differences in:

- socialising and communicating
- preferences for routine and structure
- sensory perception.

Some people may identify with and/or have been previously diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome, which has since been merged under the autism label.

Some people may still choose to refer to themselves as ‘having Asperger’s’ or being an ‘Aspie’.

ADHD

Compared to people without ADHD (which stands for attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder), ADHDers experience differences with how they regulate:

- attention
- energy
- emotions.

They may also experience differences and/or difficulties in cognitive processes like

planning, working memory and time management.

Some people may have been diagnosed with attention deficit disorder (ADD), which has since been merged under the ADHD label.

They may still refer to themselves as having 'ADD' or being an 'ADDer'.

Dyslexia

Compared to people without dyslexia, dyslexic people experience differences in reading skills.

This can include challenges with things like:

- reading (including reading speed, fluency and comprehension)
- spelling and grammar
- navigating around or differentiating left and right
- processing information quickly or holding ideas and information in short-term memory.

Dyslexia is a learning disorder, which can co-occur with other learning disorders such as dyscalculia and dysgraphia.

Dyscalculia

Compared to people without dyscalculia, dyscalculic people experience differences in arithmetic skills.

This can include challenges with things like:

- doing numerical sums without using a calculator
- doing calculations that may seem straightforward to others
- processing math-related concepts
- remembering numbers, such as dates or phone numbers.

Dysgraphia

Compared to people without dysgraphia, dysgraphic people experience differences in writing skills.

This can include challenges with things like:

- using fine motor skills (for example, holding a pen and writing)
- written expression (communicating what is meant in writing)
- spelling, punctuation and correct use of grammar.

Dyspraxia

Compared to people without dyspraxia, dyspraxic people experience differences in movement and coordination.

This can include challenges in things like:

- coordinating big or small body movements
- hand-eye coordination and maintaining balance
- using the correct word order or pronunciation in speech.

They may also experience differences and/or difficulties in cognitive processes like organisation and time management.

Dyspraxia is also known as Developmental Coordination Disorder.

More information

We have compiled a list of links where you can find more information about each condition. We don't own or endorse the content.

To learn more about autism, visit:

- Amaze
- Reframing Autism

To learn more about ADHD, visit:

- ADHD Australia
- How To ADHD

To learn more about the others, read re:think dyslexia's:

- dyslexia fact sheet
- dyscalculia fact sheet
- dysgraphia fact sheet

- dyspraxia fact sheet.

Related terms

Here are some other terms you may hear:

Multiply neurodivergent

This is a term some people use when they identify with more than one neurodivergent condition.

Some people may also use other terms to refer to their neurodivergence that relates to the combination of these.

For example, some people who are autistic and an ADHDer may combine these into the term 'AuDHD'.

It's common for people to be multiply neurodivergent.

Neurominority or minority neurotype

This is a term someone may use instead of 'neurodivergent person'.

Neuroatypical (note the 'a' in the word)

This is a term someone may use instead of neurodivergent.