



Language Guide



Autism Speaks Canada is enhancing lives today and accelerating a spectrum of solutions for tomorrow.



Our Mission

Autism Speaks Canada is dedicated to promoting solutions, across the spectrum and throughout the lifespan, for the needs of individuals with autism and their families.

We do this by supporting and working with community partners; enhancing resources and services; increasing understanding, acceptance and inclusion of people with autism spectrum disorder; and advancing research into causes and better interventions for autism spectrum disorder and related conditions.

Through partnerships and collaboration, we are committed to:

1. **Increasing global understanding and acceptance** of people with autism
2. Being a catalyst for **life-enhancing research breakthroughs**
3. Increasing **early childhood screening** and timely interventions
4. Improving the **transition to adulthood**
5. Ensuring access to **reliable information and services** throughout the life span





Our Voice and Personality

We aim to be approachable and welcoming for people with autism and the families we serve. We are committed to seeking solutions for those who need them most, and we are leaders in the autism space across research, advocacy, services and supports.

We are...

**approachable,
warm**

**compassionate,
caring**

**inclusive,
optimistic**

**pioneering,
resolute**

**collaborative,
open-minded**

**trustworthy,
genuine**

We are here to help.

We understand the unique strengths and challenges that accompany an autism diagnosis.

We understand the depth, breadth and infinite differences across the autism spectrum.

We are relentless in our pursuit of solutions for people with autism and their families.

We believe in the power of partnerships to make a true impact.

We are authentic and transparent, and share evidence-based information to best serve the community.





What is Autism?

Autism, or autism spectrum disorder (ASD), refers to a broad range of conditions characterized by challenges with social skills, repetitive behaviors, speech and nonverbal communication.

We know that there is not one autism but many subtypes, most influenced by a combination of genetic and environmental factors. Because autism is a spectrum disorder, each person with autism has a distinct set of strengths and challenges. The ways in which people with autism learn, think and problem-solve can range from highly skilled to severely challenged. Some people with ASD may require significant support in their daily lives, while others may need less support and, in some cases, live entirely independently.

A common saying in the autism community:

**“If you’ve met one person with autism,
you’ve met one person with autism.”**





Prevalence

In Canada, autism is monitored by the National Autism Surveillance System (NASS). NASS is a collaboration of federal, provincial and territorial governments, working to build a comprehensive picture of autism among children and youth in Canada. Based on 2015 data, it is estimated that 1 in 66 Canadian children and youth ages 5-17 have been diagnosed with autism. It is estimated that males are diagnosed with autism four times more frequently than females.



USE:

- 1 in 66 children and youth in Canada has an autism diagnosis
- 1 in 66 Canadian children and youth are on the autism spectrum
- The National Autism Surveillance System (NASS) estimates that 1 in 66 Canadian children and youth have autism spectrum disorder (ASD)
- Autism impacts 1 in 66 children and youth in Canada



INSTEAD OF:

- 1 in 66 people Canada have autism
- 1 in 66 people in Canada are diagnosed each day/week/month/year
- 1 in 66 adults in Canada is on the spectrum
- 1 out of every 66 people in Canada has autism

While the “1 in 66” estimate reflects children and youth on the spectrum, Autism Speaks Canada is committed to supporting people with autism at every stage of life.



Describing Autism

Autism Speaks Canada utilizes both person-first (person with autism) and identity-first language (autistic person). In 2019, we polled our community about their preference and heard that there's no "one-size-fits-all" approach. For that reason, we always recommend respecting individual preferences and using the language that is the autistic person's preferred term. Related, some autistic adults use the term "self-advocate" to describe their role in the autism community. While Autism Speaks Canada recommends language such as "autistic person, person on the spectrum or person with autism," we always respect the choice of the individual if "self-advocate" is the preferred term and follow their lead.

Following our guidelines for how Autism Speaks Canada refers to autism and the autism community.



INSTEAD OF:

high-functioning / low-functioning

suffers from or is afflicted by

Autism / Autism Spectrum Disorder



USE:

in need of more/less support or requires some, moderate or significant support

is affected by, impacted by or touched by

autism / autism spectrum disorder



WHY:

Autism encompasses a broad, diverse spectrum of behaviors and abilities. A person who struggles in one area may be highly capable in another.

Many people on the spectrum embrace autism as an intrinsic part of who they are. It is important to use language that does not connote pity or challenges, as every experience with autism is unique.

Disorders and syndromes are generally not capitalized, according to AP style. For this reason, autism and autism spectrum disorder should be lowercase, except at the beginning of a sentence.



Describing Autism



INSTEAD OF:

neurodiversity, neurodivergent, brain differences

cases or patients



USE:

autism and related challenges/conditions (in some cases, when referring to a broader population: autism and intellectual and/or developmental disabilities)

people with autism, autistic people, people on the spectrum



WHY:

“Neurodiversity” tends to equate different types of neurological conditions, when they are actually qualitatively different. Autism causes distinct functional challenges in social communication and behaviors that can impair quality of life. Neurodiversity also characterizes these functional challenges as part of the range of human variation, a perspective that tends to overlook the significant support needs of those who are severely affected by autism.

Use language that represents the person rather than their status as having a condition or as a research subject. These usages are de-humanizing.

Exception: Referring to a specific autistic person under the care of a health provider when relevant to the context.

Ex: “Before Jane became Dr. Smith’s patient, her providers overlooked the symptoms of her autism.”



Last Thoughts...

Whether you light it up blue or red,
whether your language is identity-
first or person-first,
whether you connect with the puzzle
piece or infinity loop symbols,
and whether or not you're in favor of
ABA,
lets remember that we're in the
same boat. Be respectful. Be kind.
There isn't a reason not to be.

@theautismcafe