A NEW DYNAMIC
FOR CHANGE AND INCLUSION

Acceptable language

Autism-Europe operates on the principle of respect for diversity. We feel that it is important to use language that people are comfortable with. However, there are some terms that are likely to cause offense and that it is advisable to avoid using.

In 2016 the National Autistic Society (NAS), the Royal College of GPs and the UCL Institute of Education conducted a survey within the UK of people connected to autism, to enquire about preferences regarding the use of language. Amongst British autistic adults, the term 'autistic person/people' was the most commonly preferred term. The most preferred term amongst autistic adults, families and professionals was 'people on the autism spectrum'. Within Autism-Europe itself, to reflect this feedback from the UK, cater for a preference among native speakers of other European languages towards the term 'person with autism' and in order to keep in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities that utilises person-first language throughout, all three of the above terms are used interchangeably within our communications.

Some people refer to themselves and one another as an autist / autie / aspie. Whilst we accept that people may wish to refer to themselves and each other in this way, it is often less acceptable when used by a 'neurotypical' person.

Autism-Europe urges all who are considering using the campaign materials to think about what language is acceptable and appropriate to use within their own context and geographical area, particularly from the perspective of people with autism, and to adapt the materials accordingly.

Terms/expression that are likely to cause offense

1- Suffers from or is a victim of autism: consider using the following terms instead:

- is autistic
- is on the autism spectrum
- has autism / an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) / an autism spectrum condition (ASC) (Note: The term ASD is widely used by many professionals, you may prefer to use the term 'autism spectrum condition' or 'on the autism spectrum' because it avoids the negative connotations of 'disorder'.)

2- Kanner's autism

3- "Asperger's syndrome is a rare/ mild form of autism

4- "Autism is a disease/ illness": consider using the following instead:

- autism is a disability
- autism is a condition

5- Retarded/ mentally handicapped/ backward: these terms are considered to be derogatory and offensive.

Consider using the following terms instead (where it is appropriate to do so):

- people with a learning disability
- people with a developmental disability
- people with an intellectual disability

6- Normally developing children/ adults: consider using the following terms instead:

- neurotypical (Note: This term is only used within the autism community so may not be applicable in, for example, the popular press.)
- typically developing children / adults

[1] 'Which terms should be used to describe autism? Perspectives from the UK autism community' in Autism: The International Journal of Research and Practice. See also http://www.autism.org.uk/about/what-is/describing.aspx (accessed on 06/08/2019).