

# **“A beginners A to Z guide of mid / late stage neurodivergent diagnosis terminology”**

A lighthearted resource that may be useful to neurodivergent adults in their quest to better understand their lives. For those moments of ‘WTF does that mean?’ when we don’t really want to Google it or go to TikTok but just need a simple, one-liner explanation.

## **“A is for...”**

### **Accommodations**

Adjustments or modifications in environments, tasks, or expectations that support unique cognitive, sensory, or emotional needs, helping to thrive and succeed.

### **Ableism**

Discrimination or prejudice against individuals with disabilities, including neurodivergent individuals, often resulting in societal barriers, stigmatisation, and a lack of accommodations or support to help them fully participate and thrive.

### **Alexithymia**

Difficulty identifying or describing one’s emotions, making it challenging to express feelings or understand emotional states.

### **Auditory Processing Issues**

Struggling to process and interpret sounds, even with good hearing, often leading to difficulties in noisy environments.

### **Anxiety**

Often comes from heightened awareness, sensory overload, and a brain that overanalyses everything, making even small decisions feel overwhelming.

### **Avoidance**

Often stems from overwhelm, executive dysfunction, sensory sensitivity, or anxiety, making certain tasks, conversations, or environments feel impossible to face.

### **Adaption**

Developing personalised strategies or coping mechanisms to navigate challenges in daily life, environments, or social interactions, often by altering routines or finding alternative solutions.

### **ARFID**

ARFID (Avoidant/Restrictive Food Intake Disorder) is a condition where individuals, often neurodivergent, have limited food preferences or avoid eating certain foods due to sensory sensitivities, anxiety, or difficulty with texture, taste, or the act of eating itself.

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## **“B is for...”**

### **Burnout**

Chronic exhaustion due to overstimulation, masking, and navigating a world not designed for neurodivergent individuals.

### **Body Doubling**

Body doubling is a strategy where someone else is physically present to help with focus and motivation, often used by neurodivergent individuals to overcome distractions and complete tasks.

### **Black and White Thinking**

Seeing things in extremes, good or bad, right or wrong, without recognising the grey areas in between.

### **Behaviours**

Natural expressions of cognitive differences, including stimming, hyperfocus, info-dumping, pattern recognition, and unconventional problem-solving.

### **Brain Fog**

A state of mental confusion, where focus, memory, and clarity are impaired, often triggered by stress, burnout, or sensory overload.

## **“C is for...”**

### **Comorbid & Cocurrent**

Co-morbid conditions in neurodivergent individuals refer to the presence of additional diagnoses, such as anxiety or depression, alongside the primary neurodivergent condition, while co-current conditions refer to multiple conditions occurring at the same time but not necessarily related, both influencing overall well-being and treatment.

### **Camouflaging**

A form of masking where neurodivergent individuals mimic neurotypical behaviours to fit in, often at great emotional cost.

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## **“C is for ...”**

### **Chronic Fatigue**

Constant exhaustion linked to sensory overload, burnout, or poor sleep quality due to neurodivergent brain function.

### **Cognitive Overload**

When too much information or too many tasks overwhelm the brain, leading to shutdowns or decision paralysis.

### **Communication**

Neurodivergent communication often differs in pacing, directness, tone, or depth, ranging from blunt honesty to infodumping, parallel conversations, or nonverbal expressions like scripting and gesturing.

### **Coaching**

Personalised guidance to help manage executive functioning, set and achieve goals, develop self-advocacy skills, and navigate personal or professional challenges, often with a focus on strengths and strategies that work for their unique needs.

### **Counselling**

Tailored emotional support, coping strategies, and tools to navigate challenges like sensory overload, anxiety, and social difficulties, while moving towards self-acceptance and personal growth.

### **Character Strengths**

Unique character strengths such as creativity, resilience, and innovative problem solving, enabling to view challenges and opportunities from fresh perspectives.

### **Community (peer to peer)**

A peer to peer neurodivergent community is a supportive space where individuals share experiences, offer guidance, and validate each other without judgment, building connection and empowerment.

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## **“D is for...”**

### **Dopamine**

Plays a key role in neurodivergent brains, affecting motivation, focus, emotional regulation, and the search for stimulation or novelty.

### **Difference Between Neurodiversity and Neurodivergency**

Diversity refers to variety among people, while divergency is the act of differing from a norm or expected path.

### **Delayed Processing**

Taking extra time to understand, respond to, or process information, emotions, or social cues.

### **Demand Avoidance**

An intense, often involuntary resistance to tasks or expectations, sometimes linked to Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA).

### **Disassociation**

Feeling detached from reality, oneself, or surroundings, often as a response to overwhelming sensory input, emotional distress, or burnout.

### **Dysregulation**

Challenges in managing emotional or sensory responses, often resulting in intense reactions, mood swings, or difficulty shifting between states of arousal.

## **“E is for...”**

### **Executive Dysfunction**

Difficulty with organising, starting, prioritising, or completing tasks, making everyday life more challenging.

### **Emotional Processing**

Characterised by unique patterns, where emotions may be felt more intensely or nonlinearly, often requiring personalized strategies for understanding and regulation.

### **Emotional Dysregulation**

Difficulty managing emotions, leading to intense reactions, sudden mood shifts, or emotional overwhelm.

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## **“E is for...”**

### **Emotional Re-regulation**

The process of returning to emotional or sensory balance after dysregulation, often through specific coping strategies like stimming, deep breathing, or engaging in a calming activity.

### **Echolalia**

Repeating words or phrases (either immediately or later), sometimes for communication, comfort, or processing.

### **Empathy**

Empathy can be experienced differently, often deeply emotional or highly analytical, and sometimes expressed through actions rather than words or in ways that might not align with social expectations.

### **Extraordinary**

Unique, often exceptional qualities or abilities that set individuals apart, like creative problem-solving, intense focus, or a deep understanding of systems, which may be overlooked by conventional standards.

### **Education and learning**

Education and learning experiences can be challenging in traditional settings, often requiring individualised approaches, accommodations, and support to thrive, as they may process information, learn, or engage in ways that differ from conventional methods.

## **“F is for...”**

### **Feeling Seen**

Being understood and accepted without judgment, and having individual unique experiences and needs recognised and validated by others.

### **Fawning**

A trauma response where someone excessively people pleases to avoid conflict or rejection.

### **Fatigue (Sensory, Social, Cognitive)**

Exhaustion from constant sensory input, social interactions, or mental effort, common in neurodivergent individuals.

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## **“F is for...”**

### **Food Sensitivities**

Struggles with textures, tastes, or strong flavours due to heightened sensory processing differences.

## **“G is for...”**

### **Grief**

Grief can reshape neurodivergent self identity, forcing a reprocessing of past experiences, coping strategies, and our place in the world.

### **Gaslighting (Medical & Social)**

Being told experiences aren't real, whether by doctors dismissing neurodivergence or by society minimising struggles.

### **Guilt**

Can appear for many reasons, such as over apologising, rumination, masking, people pleasing, feeling responsible for other's emotions, meltdowns and behaviours (amongst many others)...

### **God Mode**

Experiencing a state of intense focus, productivity, or clarity, often unlocking their full potential to accomplish tasks with precision and speed, sometimes in an almost effortless flow.

## **“H is for...”**

### **Hyperfixation**

An intense, prolonged focus on a specific interest or task, often to the point of losing track of time or neglecting other responsibilities, commonly experienced by people with ADHD or autism.

### **Hormones (peri menopause, menopause, andropause, menstruation)**

Exacerbated hormonal fluctuations that impact neurobiological systems, leading to increased cognitive difficulties (e.g., memory lapses, brain fog), heightened sensory sensitivities, and intensified mood dysregulation, potentially worsening symptoms of ADHD, anxiety, and other neurodivergent traits.

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## **“H is for...”**

### **Hypersensitivity & Hyposensitivity**

Experiencing heightened (hypersensitivity) or reduced (hyposensitivity) responses to sensory input. Struggles with textures, tastes, or strong flavours due to heightened sensory processing differences.

### **Harmful Internalised Beliefs**

Growing up undiagnosed can lead to internalising negative messages, for example believing oneself to be “lazy” or “broken.”

### **Hoarding**

Some neurodivergent individuals struggle with letting go of items due to emotional attachment or sensory comfort.

### **Hyperfocus**

Intense concentration on a single task or interest, often leading to high productivity or deep immersion, but can also result in losing track of time or neglecting other responsibilities.

## **“I is for...”**

### **Inertia**

The difficulty in initiating or transitioning between tasks, often due to executive dysfunction, making it hard to start or shift focus despite knowing what needs to be done.

### **Intersection**

Overlapping aspects of their identity, such as gender, race, or disability, which can create unique challenges and experiences that influence how they navigate the world and advocate for their needs.

### **Interoception**

The ability to sense and interpret internal body signals, like hunger, thirst, pain, or heart rate, which can be challenging for neurodivergent individuals, especially those with autism.

### **Information Overload**

Information overload is when the brain is overwhelmed by too much information at once, making it difficult to process, prioritize, or retain, which is especially challenging for neurodivergent individuals with executive dysfunction.

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## **“I is for...”**

### **Info Dumping**

When a neurodivergent person shares a deep, enthusiastic dive into a topic they love, often with extensive detail and without checking if the listener is equally invested.

### **Insomnia**

Often comes from a mix of racing thoughts, sensory sensitivities, and a brain that refuses to shut down, no matter how exhausted the body is.

## **“J is for...”**

### **Justice Sensitivity**

A strong emotional response to injustice, unfairness, or unethical behaviour.

### **Journaling**

A helpful tool for tracking emotions, patterns, and neurodivergent experiences.

### **Jargon**

Medical and psychological terminology can make diagnosis and self-understanding more difficult.

## **“K is for...”**

### **Kinetic Learning**

Many neurodivergent individuals learn best through movement and hands-on experiences.

### **Kindness to Self**

Self-compassion is essential in healing from masking, burnout, and negative self-perception.



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## **“L is for...”**

### **Late Diagnosis**

Discovering neurodivergence in adulthood can bring relief, grief, and identity shifts.

### **Liminal Space**

The feeling of being “in between” after discovering neurodivergence, no longer who you thought you were but still figuring it out.

### **Low Dopamine**

Struggles with motivation and task initiation due to dopamine regulation issues.

### **Looping Thoughts**

Persistent, repetitive thoughts that can be comforting or distressing.

## **“M is for...”**

### **Masking**

Suppressing neurodivergent traits to appear more neurotypical, often leading to burnout.

### **Meltdown**

An intense, involuntary response to overwhelm, often involving loss of control, distress, or shutdown, common in autism and other neurodivergent conditions.

### **Monotropism**

A cognitive theory explaining why many neurodivergent people hyperfocus, whilst ND brains work best when deeply engaged in one subject.

### **Misdiagnosis**

Many neurodivergent individuals are first misdiagnosed with anxiety, depression, personality disorders amongst many others.

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## **“N is for...”**

### **Neuroaffirming**

Respecting, validating, and supporting neurodivergent experiences without trying to “fix” or change them.

### **Neuroaffirming Spaces**

Environments that respect and accommodate neurodivergent needs.

### **Navigating Relationships**

Social interactions can be challenging due to differences in communication styles and emotional processing.

### **Neurokindness Club**

A public journal of late stage AuDHD & OCD on Substack.

### **Noise Sensitivity**

Noise sensitivity is an heightened response to sound, where certain noises feel overwhelming, painful, or distracting, common in autism, ADHD, and sensory processing disorders.

### **Nervous System**

Heightened responses to sensory input, stress, and emotions, often requiring tailored strategies to manage overload and maintain balance.

## **“O is for...”**

### **Overwhelm**

Mental or emotional overload from sensory input, socialising, or too many demands.

### **Object Permanence**

Forgetting about objects, tasks, or people when they're out of sight.

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## **“P is for...”**

### **Permission**

Giving the freedom to prioritise well being, set boundaries, and embrace their authentic needs without guilt or fear of judgment.

### **Peeling the onion**

Peeling the onion in a late-stage diagnosis means uncovering deep layers of past experiences, behaviors, and coping mechanisms, finally making sense of them through a neurodivergent lens.

### **Pattern Recognition**

Recognising patterns in unique ways, seeing connections others miss or processing information in nonlinear, intuitive, or highly detailed ways.

### **Procrastination**

Often linked to executive dysfunction, perfectionism, and anxiety, not laziness.

### **Paralysis**

A state of being mentally overwhelmed to the point of struggling to start or complete tasks, often due to executive dysfunction, anxiety, or sensory overload.

### **Perseveration**

The repetitive focus on a thought, task, or behavior, often due to difficulty shifting attention, common in autism and ADHD.

### **People Pleasing**

Often stems from a desire to avoid conflict, meet social expectations, or mask true feelings, leading to emotional exhaustion and a loss of personal boundaries.

## **“Q is for...”**

### **Quiet Neurodivergence**

When struggles are internalised rather than external, leading to late diagnosis.

### **Questioning Self Identity**

A common experience after discovering neurodivergence, rethinking past experiences and relationships.

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## **“R is for...”**

### **Rejection Sensitivity Dysphoria (RSD)**

An intense emotional response to perceived or actual rejection, criticism, or failure, often seen in ADHD and other neurodivergent conditions.

### **Routine**

Essential for some, restrictive for others.

## **“S is for...”**

### **Saboteurs**

Internalised negative beliefs, anxiety, executive dysfunction, or external pressures that undermine personal goals, well-being, or self-advocacy.

### **Sensory Overload**

Sensory overload is when the brain struggles to process too much sensory input at once, leading to overwhelm, distress, or shutdown, common in autism, ADHD, and sensory processing disorders.

### **Special Interests**

Deep, passionate interests that bring joy and intense focus.

### **Self Compassion**

Recognising and accepting their unique challenges and needs, treating themselves with kindness rather than judgment, and giving themselves space to rest and recover without guilt.

### **Stimming**

Stimming (self-stimulatory behavior) is repetitive movement, sound, or activity, like hand-flapping, rocking, or humming, used to self regulate emotions, focus, or manage sensory input.

### **Sidequest**

When curiosity, hyperfocus, or impulsivity leads to an unplanned deep dive or tangent, often more exciting than the “main quest” (task at hand).

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## **“S is for...”**

### **Success Enablers**

Often include a mix of hyperfocus, unique problem solving skills, support structures, and environments that allow for flexibility and creativity.

### **Somatic**

Physical sensations or reactions, like tension, discomfort, or heightened awareness, triggered by emotional or sensory overload, often requiring mindfulness or grounding techniques to process.

### **Self Identity**

Often involves navigating a complex relationship with societal expectations, embracing unique cognitive patterns, and finding self worth in a world that may not fully understand or validate their experiences.

### **Social Fatigue**

Can happen when prolonged interaction drains mental energy, often due to masking, sensory overload, or the effort of navigating social norms.

### **Superpower**

Refers to unique strengths, such as intense focus, creativity, pattern recognition, or problem-solving, that stem from the different ways the brain processes information and experiences the world.

### **Self Medication**

Using substances or behaviors (like alcohol, caffeine, or other coping mechanisms) to manage symptoms of anxiety, stress, sensory overload, or emotional dysregulation, often as a way to cope when other supports aren't available.

### **Self Advocacy**

Speaking up for needs, rights, and accommodations, navigating systems to ensure they are supported in ways that respect their unique cognitive and emotional experiences.

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## **“T is for...”**

### **Therapy**

Focuses on providing tailored strategies for managing challenges like emotional regulation, social interactions, and sensory sensitivities, while also developing self acceptance and empowerment.

### **Therapy Modalities**

Internal Family Systems (IFS), parts work, EMDR, Schema Therapy, and Somatic Experiencing, help process trauma, rewire patterns, and heal by addressing deep emotional wounds, body responses, and internalised beliefs.

### **Time Blindness**

Time blindness is a difficulty in perceiving and managing time, making it hard to estimate durations, plan tasks, or sense how much time has passed, often seen in ADHD and other neurodivergent conditions.

### **Task Switching Fatigue**

Mental exhaustion from shifting between tasks due to executive dysfunction.

### **Trauma and Neurodivergence**

Neurodivergent people often experience trauma more intensely due to heightened sensitivity, social challenges, and a world not built for their needs. Trauma can also mimic or worsen neurodivergent traits, making self-regulation, executive function, and sensory processing even more challenging.

### **Triation (of meds)**

Refers to the gradual adjustment of medication dosage, often done to find the right balance between efficacy and minimising side effects.

### **Time Collapse**

When the perception of time becomes distorted, often leading to a sense of losing track of hours or feeling overwhelmed by an impending deadline, especially under stress or during hyperfocus.

## **“U is for...”**

### **Unmasking**

Unmasking is the process of reducing or letting go of learned behaviors used to hide neurodivergent traits, often leading to greater authenticity but also vulnerability as one navigates social expectations and self acceptance.

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## **“V is for...”**

### **Validation**

Validation is the acknowledgment and acceptance of someone's feelings, experiences, or identity as real and important, which is especially crucial for neurodivergent individuals who often face misunderstanding or dismissal.

## **“W is for...”**

### **Weighted Blankets**

A sensory tool providing deep pressure stimulation for calmness.

### **Workplace Challenges**

Often include navigating sensory overload, communication differences, social expectations, and executive functioning demands, which can impact productivity, wellbeing, and the ability to advocate for necessary accommodations.

### **Workplace Accommodations**

Workplace accommodations are adjustments that support neurodivergent employees in managing their needs, such as flexible scheduling, sensory-friendly environments, communication modifications, and task management tools.

## **“X is for...”**

### **X Ray Vision**

Refers to the ability to see patterns, nuances, or details others might miss, often with a deep understanding of systems or people, but it can also feel overwhelming at times.

## **“Y is for...”**

### **Yearning for Understanding**

Wanting others to accept neurodivergence without judgement.

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### **“Y is for...”**

#### **Years lost (and found)**

Reflecting on periods of struggling with misunderstood traits, unrecognized needs, or navigating a world that didn't accommodate them, followed by a journey of self-discovery, acceptance, and embracing their true identity.

### **“Z is for...”**

#### **Zero f\*\*ks given**

Giving zero f\*\*ks about arbitrary norms, questioning social expectations and prioritizing authenticity over conformity.

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