

Understanding Neurodiversity

Why We Use These Words

A Gift for Educators Resource

The term neurodiversity was first coined in 1998 by Australian sociologist Judy Singer, who is autistic. She wanted to describe the natural differences in human brains the same way we celebrate biodiversity in nature.

Just as nature thrives because of many different species, humanity thrives because of many different kinds of minds. Neurodiversity is not a disorder — it is a natural and valuable part of being human.

Key terms we use today:

- **Neurodiversity** – the broad idea that all brains are different and that these differences are normal and valuable.
- **Neurodivergent** – describes a person whose brain functions differently from the typical (neurotypical) pattern. This includes autism, ADHD, dyslexia, DCD/dyspraxia, developmental delay, and many others.
- **Neurotypical** – describes people whose brains function in the most common way in our society.
- **Neurodiverse** – correctly refers to a group of people who have a mix of neurotypical and neurodivergent brains (we never say “a neurodiverse person” — we say “a neurodivergent person”).

Why we no longer use older terms

Words like “disorder,” “deficit,” “abnormal,” or “handicap” focus only on what is “wrong.” Modern language focuses on strengths, dignity, and inclusion. We now speak about differences, not deficits.

At Gift for Educators and the Autism Community Thrift Store, we choose these respectful, up-to-date words because every person deserves to be seen for their gifts, not their challenges. When we use kind and accurate language, we help create a world where everyone feels they truly belong.

Neurodiversity is a gift — and every mind is welcome here.