

Kisharon Langdon

The Jewish Learning Disability
& Autism Community

Language Matters

Respectful, inclusive language for referring to learning disabilities, difficulties, autism and neurodiversity



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Key terms & usage

Purpose Of This Guide

This guide is to ensure that all written and spoken communication across Kisharon Langdon reflects dignity, respect and inclusivity for the people we support, their families and our community.

The guidance is rooted in best practice, aligns with UK standards (e.g. NHS, Mencap, National Autistic Society) and is regularly reviewed for relevance and cultural sensitivity.

Learning Disability

Definition

A learning disability is a reduced intellectual ability and difficulty with everyday activities, for example, household tasks, socialising or managing money, which affects someone for their whole life.

APPROPRIATE USE

- ✓ Person with a learning disability
- ✓ People with learning disabilities
- ✓ Adults with learning disabilities

AVOID

- ✗ Learning difficulties (when you mean a learning disability- they are different)
- ✗ Mentally handicapped, slow, retarded - these are outdated and offensive
- ✗ The learning disabled - this depersonalises and is not inclusive

Note: In the UK, *learning disability* is a recognised clinical and social term, unlike in the US where it may mean something different.

Learning Difficulty

Definition

A learning difficulty refers to a condition like dyslexia, ADHD or dyspraxia that affects how a person learns in a specific way but does not affect overall intelligence.

APPROPRIATE USE

- ✓ Person with a learning difficulty such as dyslexia
- ✓ Young people with learning difficulties

AVOID

- ✗ Using this term when you mean learning disability

Important distinction: A learning disability is lifelong and impacts multiple areas of functioning; a learning difficulty is usually specific to certain areas like reading, writing or coordination.

Autism

Definition

Autism is a lifelong developmental condition that affects how people perceive the world and interact with others.

BOTH IDENTITY-FIRST AND PERSON FIRST ARE ACCEPTABLE

- ✓ Autistic person (identity-first language)
- ✓ Person on the autism spectrum (person-first language)

KISHARON LANGDON GUIDANCE

- ✓ Use **what the individual prefers** wherever possible
- ✓ Default to neutral descriptions in formal writing: e.g. people on the autism spectrum

AVOID

- ✗ Suffers from autism or afflicted with autism
- ✗ Autistic disorder (unless referring to specific diagnostic categories in a clinical context)
- ✗ Low-functioning / high-functioning - these oversimplify a complex condition
- ✗ Person with autism

Neurodiverse / Neurodivergent / Neurodiversity

Definition

These terms refer to the diversity of human brains and cognition.
Neurodivergent people include those with autism, ADHD, dyslexia and others.

USE

- ✓ Neurodivergent person (refers to someone whose brain functions differently from what is considered typical)
- ✓ Neurodiverse group (a group containing both neurodivergent and neurotypical people)
- ✓ Neurodiversity (the concept or movement)

AVOID

- ✗ Calling an individual neurodiverse- use neurodivergent instead
- ✗ Using these terms if the audience or context requires more specific language (e.g. health or legal settings)

General Guidelines for Inclusive Language

- **Use person-first language**, unless the individual states a preference for identity-first (e.g. person with a learning disability vs. disabled person).
- **Respect preferences:** Always ask how someone prefers to be described if you are unsure.
- **Avoid deficit-based language:** Don't describe people in terms of what they lack or cannot do. Focus on strengths and support needs.



"Needs support with daily living"

AVOID



"Can't live independently"

- **Steer clear of euphemisms** that obscure meaning: Be clear and respectful rather than overly cautious (e.g. say autism not special needs unless the context requires it).

Examples Of Preferred Phrasing

Please see below for our quick reference table which gives examples of phrases to avoid and which phrases are preferred:



AVOID

- Suffers from autism
- The disabled
- Learning difficulties (when meant as disability)
- Handicapped
- Low functioning
- Special needs person



USE INSTEAD

- Autistic person
- Disabled people /
People with disabilities
- Learning disabilities
- Person with
a learning disability
- Person with
high support needs
- Person with a learning
disability (if appropriate)

Tone and Context

- Keep tone respectful, positive, and empowering.
- In promotional or public-facing material, focus on the individual first, their goals, achievements and contributions, not only their condition.

Examples Of Preferred Phrasing

Please see below for our quick reference table which gives examples of phrases to avoid and which phrases are preferred:

TERM	DEFINITION	 CORRECT USAGE
Learning Disability	Lifelong condition affecting intellectual ability and everyday life	Person with a learning disability
Learning Difficulty	Specific difficulty (e.g. dyslexia) not affecting general intellect	Person with a learning difficulty
Autism	Developmental difference affecting communication and interaction	Autistic person/person on the autism spectrum
Neurodivergent	Describes a person whose brain functions differently	Neurodivergent individual
Neurodiverse	Describes a group, not a person	Neurodiverse team or population

For More Information

This style guide is a living document. Language evolves and so do individual preferences. Always aim for empathy, clarity, and inclusion.

For questions or further training on language and inclusivity, contact the **Kisharon Langdon Marketing and Communications team** or **Learning & Development team**.

Email comms@kisharonlangdon.org.uk or call us on **020 3209 1180**.

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