



Language Used by the Autism Society of North Carolina

The Autism Society of North Carolina spends a lot of time listening to individuals and families to truly understand the backgrounds, needs, and preferences of those we serve. Our ongoing dialogues have shaped the way the language we use about autism.

Identity-First and Person-First Language

For many years, organizations recommended using person-first language (person with autism) rather than identity-first language (autistic person). This recommendation was meant to emphasize that a person is more than a diagnosis.

Many in our community, especially autistic adults, prefer identity-first language because autism is such an important and inherent part of identity.

We use both identity-first and person-first language, and when we know a preference exists, we use the term preferred by the person being served.

Support Needs

We know it is intimidating for families navigating a new diagnosis to understand all the ways autism is described, and we know that many have issues with language related to functioning levels (“high-functioning” and “low-functioning”).

We have shifted toward framing the spectrum by support needed. Support needs vary for everyone, whether they are on the spectrum or not. One person may need little support with academics or work tasks but need a higher level of support for social skills and managing emotions. Another person may need more support with communication but less support for daily living activities. As all individuals work toward their unique goals, the levels of support needed will change, so this approach allows us to stay flexible with describing services and programs.

We want to thank all of the individuals, families, staff, and professionals who have shared the feedback and insights that have led to our more inclusive language.