

# Neurodiverga-WHAT?

## A DEFINITION

A “neurodivergent” person refers to a person on the autism spectrum or, more generally, to someone whose brain processes information in a way that is not typical of most individuals.

## STATISTICS

While many stats today are based on childhood numbers most of these disorders are NOT something you “outgrow.

1. Estimated 15-20 people globally are ND
  - a. Estimates put the number of NDs at almost 1 in 5 people worldwide. At this conference that would be somewhere between 50 and 60 people
  - b. Perhaps their neurodiversity comes with a higher willingness to take risks, a greater ability to see the bigger picture, or a willingness to say things others aren't.
2. Approximately 25% of CEOs have dyslexia
3. CNBC states ND individuals have an unemployment rate as high as 30-40%
4. 7.2% of the world's child population (129 million) has ADHD
5. 1 in 36 children in the US have autism
6. 45% of children with ADHD have a learning disorder

## COMBINED AREAS OF POSSIBLE STRUGGLE

1. Focus
2. Social Skills
3. Big Feelings
4. Mind Blindness
5. Mental Health
6. Learning Struggles
7. Identity
8. Executive Dysfunction
9. Overstimulation
  - a. Burnout – Know your natural rhythms
10. Shutdown
11. Loneliness
12. Communication
13. Routine
14. Change

## NEURODIVERGENT STRENGTHS

1. Creativity
2. Hyperfocus
3. Attention to Detail
4. Empathy
5. Curiosity
6. Pattern Recognition

7. Problem Solving
8. Recall Details
9. Fast Processing Speeds
10. Innovation
11. Resilience
12. Out-of-Box Thinking
13. Unique Perspective

## SOME HELPFUL STRATEGIES

1. Schedule – We hate it. But we need it.
  - a. While we may HATE the schedule, we NEED the schedule. Often because we don't take change well, our need for the daily routine is vital.
  - b. A neurodivergent brain's struggle to organize their day into "banking hours" can result in major stress and a negative impact on their success.
2. Don't "Should" Yourself –
  - a. We're told we "should" put many NT writing strategies in place for the process of writing that simply won't work for the ND.
  - b. Our personal writing process is different from the actual writing craft. Try out suggestions. If they don't work—they don't work.
  - c. While we definitely need the rules for writing, our process can vary greatly. And that's okay. More than okay.
3. Don't Mask
  - a. Be honest with other about your ND and your specific needs.
  - b. Advocate—don't hide.
  - c. Masking is exhausting.
  - d. What do you need? Ask for it.
4. Environment Matters – What is your best writing environment? Fight for it.
5. Also, make sure that at least a portion of what you are writing you are actually interested in!!!! Especially those with Autism and ADHD
6. Know Your Rhythms – Plan according to your natural highs and lows.
  - a. When are you most focused and most aware? These are the days and the times you should schedule your most difficult tasks—especially when writing.
  - b. THINK about how you schedule yourself – My lesson plans as an example
7. "Self" Care – Mental and physical health is vital.
  - a. Eat! Set alarms to remind yourself to get up and eat. To move. Wear the clothing your comfortable in, live with post it notes. Whatever brings calm and peace and a good working environment – use it!
8. Give Yourself Grace – Don't beat yourself up for the behaviors out of your control.
  - a. We live in a NT world. While we don't need to make excuses for the times we are actually lazy or just being disobedient to the holy spirit, we need to remember there are actual reasons for why we sometimes make the mistakes we do.

## GOD'S TRUTH AND ND

Mark Eckel states:

“Though difficult, it is important to say concurrently about neurodiversity that the fall of Adam twisted all creation<sup>7</sup>; and yet the intact, undamaged structure of God’s image in humans still exists. Passages such as Genesis 9:6, Psalm 8, Matthew 22:15-22, Romans 8:29, and James 3:9 clearly articulate the theological truth that every individual still bears the perfect stamp of God’s image on them.

The imperative of this truth is essential to make the point that God’s image in neurodiverse people is undamaged. Christian educational institutions could lead the way in producing clarity for understanding and care because of the dual Scriptural teaching—that humans are both dignified and depraved—within the scope of discussions on neurodiversity. Biblical thinking can encourage a broad, human vision of interconnected, cross-disciplinary opportunities in the academe that both truths teach.”

<https://christianscholars.com/from-stranger-to-neighbor-neurodiversitys-visionary-opportunities-as-public-intellectuals-promote-the-common-good/>

## So...YOU WANNA INCLUDE A ND CHARACTER?

“At the end of the day, what really adds authenticity to your neurodiverse characters is everything else in an autistic person’s life that have nothing to do with their traits.” Mark Wheaton, *Writer’s Digest*

1. Research – Dive in. Travel down worm hole. Interview. Learn. Learn. Learn.
2. No Cliches – Not a single ND diagnosis looks the same for anyone.
3. Don’t “Fix” – Your character has a life-long struggle. Ending your work in a “cure” only makes the ND reader feel like they aren’t acceptable as they are.
4. Experience – The old adage is true: Write what you know. It is going to be extremely difficult to capture the truth of ND if you are NT or if you are not closely connected to someone who is ND.
5. Say NOPE to Tropes – Tropes demonstrate knowledge of stereotypes—not true knowledge.
6. Get Help – Seek the advice of more than one ND when writing. Even if you’re ND. They need to be some of your early readers.
7. The only people who can really joke about ND are those who have it.
8. The character’s personality should not be ONLY their ND traits.
9. Character development and “fixing” are two different things – be careful
10. “We’re all a little ADHD”
11. You can be neurodivergent and have a good life.
12. Tropes to Avoid –
  - a. Your ND is a “savant” – somehow suggests that in order to be acceptable, they must have something “magical;”
  - b. Your antagonist has mental illness—more often than not, mentally ill are more likely to be victims instead of perpetrators. There’s a fine line between someone having mental illness and someone making a choice for evil;
  - c. Your creepy character has MANY traits often associated with autism
  - d. Your protagonist has an ND “sidekick”

## RESOURCES AND LINKS

<https://www.svaraproject.com/blog/neurodivergence-artist-brain>

<https://medium.com/the-museum-of-the-neurodivergent-aesthetic/why-support-neurodiversity-in-the-arts-1896478c06f>

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26402785>

<https://www.washington.edu/doit/what-do-%E2%80%9Cneurodiverse%E2%80%9D-and-%E2%80%9Cneurodivergent%E2%80%9D-mean>

<https://us.specialisterne.com/neurodiversity-and-creativity-what-we-do-well-and-what-organizations-can-do-better/>

<https://imagine.jhu.edu/blog/2022/10/05/neurodivergence-at-a-glance/>

<https://www.autismspeaks.org/autism-statistics-asd>

<https://chadd.org/about-adhd/general-prevalence/>

<https://charliehealth.com/post/what-it-means-to-be-neurodivergent-how-it-relates-to-mental-health>

<https://themighty.com/topic/autism-spectrum-disorder/being-neurodiverse-in-a-neurotypical-world/>