

# Scouts Australia

## Factsheet: Understanding Neurodiversity

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### Introduction

In Scouts, we celebrate diversity and all neurodiverse adults and youth members are welcome in our Scout Groups. There are already some great things we do as Scouts that support neurodiverse people, such as our structured sessions and our balanced programme. However, there are also some things that neurodiverse people may find challenging and need extra support with.

We are committed to helping members in Scouts understand neurodiversity and to provide resources and guidance. This factsheet is designed to help you to better understand and support neurodiverse youth and adults in Scouts and adjust Scouting activities so that neurodiverse people can fully participate alongside their neurotypical peers.

While this factsheet provides general information, it's important to remember that the young person and their parents/carers or the adult volunteer are themselves the experts on their individual needs. We should be guided by them in terms of practically what is required, how they talk about their needs and their expectations for how others will work in partnership with them.

### What is Neurodiversity?<sup>1</sup>

Neurodiversity is the idea that there is natural variation in how people's brains work and how people experience, understand and interact with the world. This means there are natural differences in the way people learn and communicate.

Most children's brains develop in ways that are seen as typical for their age and stage. These children can be described as **neurotypical**. About 1 in 5-6 children have variations in their brain development. These children can be described as **neurodiverse**. Examples of neurodiversity include: Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Dyslexia, Tic Disorders (e.g Tourette Syndrome) and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/a-z-health-reference/neurodiversity-neurodivergence-guide-for-families>



## Types of Neurodiversity<sup>2</sup>

Neurodiversity is an umbrella term for a range of disorders and conditions. Below is a summary of some of the more common types of neurodiversity. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list.

<b>Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)</b>	A developmental disorder that affects how people behave and interact with the world around them.
<b>Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)</b>	A developmental disorder that affects the executive function of people's brains and their ability to self-regulate and control thoughts, words, actions and emotions.
<b>Dyslexia</b>	A learning disorder that makes it challenging for people to recognise words which leads to problems with spelling, writing and reading.
<b>Tic Disorders (E.g Tourette Syndrome)</b>	A neurological disorder that causes people to make involuntary and uncontrollable vocal sounds and movements called tics.
<b>Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)</b>	An anxiety disorder where people experience reoccurring obsessions (unwanted thoughts, images or urges) and compulsions (repetitive behaviours or rituals).



It is important to be respectful and inclusive when talking with, and speaking about, neurodiverse members. What terminology or language is acceptable for one person, might not be acceptable for another. Ask each neurodiverse member what language they would like to be used.

## Characteristics of neurodiversity

**Common characteristics displayed by neurodiverse members might include:**

- Challenges with communicating and interacting with others.
- Repetitive and different behaviours, moving their bodies in different ways.
- Strong interest in one topic or subject.
- Unusual reactions to what they see, hear, smell, touch or taste.
- Preferences for routines and a dislike of change.

Remember that every neurodiverse person is different, so it is critical to understand their individual characteristics and how Scouting might support them best. For practical tips on how to support neurodiverse members in Scouting, please see factsheet about supporting youth and adults with neurodiversity.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/neurodiversity-and-neurodivergence>

## Further information and support

### Scouts Australia Resources

Scouts Australia has developed a range of resources to support inclusion of neurodiverse youth and adults in Scouting. Resources include:

- Factsheet: Practical Tips for Supporting Neurodiverse Youth
- Factsheet: Practical Tips for Supporting Neurodiverse Adult volunteers
- Parent and Carer Conversation Framework – Initial Conversation
- Parent and Carer Conversation Framework – Ready to Scout Conversation
- Template – Ready to Scout Plan
- Template – Supporting Youth Plan

These resources are available <https://scouts.com.au/members/key-resources/>

### Other resources

Scouts UK Resources – Supporting People with Additional Needs

<https://www.scouts.org.uk/volunteers/equity-diversity-and-inclusion/supporting-people-with-additional-needs/>

Autism Awareness Australia website - <https://www.autismawareness.com.au/>

Raising Children Network Australia (has a range of factsheets and resources on types of neurodiversity (<https://raisingchildren.net.au>))