

This resource is part one of a mini-series created in partnership with [Neurodiverse Sport](#). It aims to improve **understanding about neurodiversity**, and how to support neurodivergent paddlers to have **inclusive** and **accessible** paddling experiences.

What is neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity is a term that describes all the different ways in which our **brains function**. There is no “right” way of thinking or learning, just a spectrum of **different** ones. Within your club, group of friends or workplace, there is neurodiversity already.

Alongside neurodiversity, we might also see terms including **neurotypical** people and **neurodivergent** people. Definitions for these words, along with other common terms, can be found in the glossary in this resource.

Why do we need to know more about neurodiversity?

Levels of understanding about neurodiversity and how to support neurodivergent people are very varied. This can mean that people who have conditions such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), autism or dyslexia are **not able to access the support** they might need in order to be fully included and thrive.

This mini-series aims to **improve the information** available about neurodiversity. It will also help the paddling community ensure that they can **support people with a range of neurological experiences**. Improving our knowledge in this area ensures we don't rely on stereotypes, and maintain a person centred approach.

What are the facts?

An estimated **1 in 7** people in the UK are neurodivergent

The British Medical Association estimates that **1 in 100** children in the UK are diagnosed with autism

The British Dyslexia Association estimates **10% of the UK** to be on the dyslexia continuum

Many athletes are neurodivergent. For example, **Michael Phelps** (swimmer) and **Simone Biles** (gymnast) both have ADHD

The **experiences of those with neurodivergent conditions is varied**, but the numbers above show the prevalence of people with these conditions in the UK population. It's likely that these figures are actually **higher in reality**, due to low diagnosis rates among women and lower socio-economic communities.

Many people you know, including colleagues or fellow paddlers, could be neurodivergent. It's also possible that there is a higher proportion of neurodivergent people active in sport and physical activity than in the general population.

Paddling can offer **many benefits** to neurodiverse paddlers, such as the feeling of **freedom** away from land, enjoying **blue spaces and nature**, and being **part of a group** while paddling separately.

Glossary

This glossary summarises some of the **most common terms** you might encounter when talking about and learning about **neurodiversity** and **neurodivergent conditions**. You can also find additional information and resources in places such as [The Brain Charity](#), [AMASE](#) and [Play Learn Chat](#).

Executive function: Executive function refers to the set of cognitive processes that help us to complete tasks or goals. Some neurodivergent people may struggle with a consistent level of executive function, which means they may struggle to focus on or complete a task.

Hyperfocus: Hyperfocus is an intense absorption into a task, topic or activity for an extended period of time. For some people with neurodivergent conditions, this can come at the detriment of other tasks or responsibilities. It can also affect the ability for a person to focus on multiple tasks or stimuli.

Intellectual disability: Intellectual disability is “a term used when a person has certain limitations in cognitive functioning and skills, including conceptual, social and practical skills, such as language, social and self-care skills” ([Special Olympics](#)).

Not all people who have neurodivergent conditions have an intellectual disability.

Learning disability: A learning disability “is to do with the way someone's brain works. It makes it harder for someone to learn, understand or do things.” ([Mencap](#)). This is sometimes confused with neurodivergent conditions such as dyslexia or ADHD.

It is important to recognise the difference between the two. Mencap describes those conditions “as a ‘learning difficulty’ because, unlike learning disability, it does not affect intellect”.

Masking: Masking refers to the actions or other strategies that people with neurodivergent conditions use to hide their thoughts, emotions, or difficulties associated with their condition. Masking is often used as a strategy to ‘fit in’ with peers. Long-term masking can be very mentally and physically exhausting.

Mental health conditions: Mental health conditions are conditions which affect a person’s mental, emotional and psychological wellbeing.

Neurodivergent conditions are not the same as mental health conditions. However, in settings where neurodivergent people are excluded or unsupported, they may experience poor mental health as a result.

Neurodiversity: Neurodiversity refers to the diversity in the neurological experiences and brain function across a population or group. A person does not ‘have’ neurodiversity. Instead there is diversity across a group of people, as everyone’s brains will function differently.

When neurodiversity is used as an umbrella term for this topic, it refers to the full range and spectrum of these experiences.

Neurodivergence or neurodivergent: A person is neurodivergent if they have a neurological experience which is different to the majority. They may also have a condition including (but not limited to) autism, ADHD or dyslexia.

Neurodivergence is the term used to describe the neurological experience of a person or persons that is different from the majority within a group.

Neurotypical: This term is used to describe someone who has a neurological experience that is the same as the majority of a group, such as the general population.

Sensory overload: Sensory overload is an experience common for many with neurodivergent conditions. This is where multiple sensory stimuli causes someone to become distressed or disorientated.

Shutdown: Related to sensory overload, a shutdown can occur when there has been too much sensory input. A shutdown can cause people to lose the ability to respond verbally or manage any further sensory input.

Stimming: Stimming is a shortened term for self-stimulating behaviour. This can help individuals with neurodivergent conditions to self-regulate, or respond to the environment around them. It can include a range of actions, such as twitching or flapping one's hands, or vocal stims such as humming.