

Neurodiversity

*Tips by and for trans, non-binary
and intersex people*



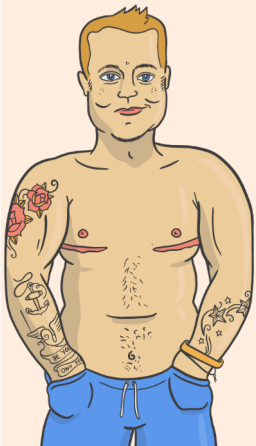
the
clare
project

Supporting Trans Communities,
Campaigning for Inclusion.

What do trans, non-binary and intersex mean?

This booklet is written by and for people who are trans, non-binary and intersex (TNBI) and also neurodivergent.

We use TNBI here to describe people who are not cisgender.



Cisgender means that someone totally identifies with their gender assigned at birth - most of the population. So TNBI includes people who are trans, non-binary, genderqueer, and those who don't have a gender identity (agender).

TNBI also includes people with a range of different intersex variations. An intersex person is someone whose biological sex traits do not fall into just one of the more common male/female patterns.



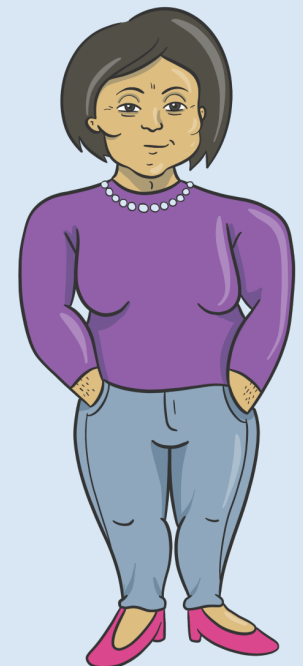
What does neurodivergent mean?

Neurodivergent means that we have a variation in the way our brains work - for example, we might be autistic or experience attention-deficit hyperactivity (ADHD).

- Neurodivergent describes a person
- Neurodiversity describes the spectrum
- Neurotypical describes people who don't have one of these variations - most of the population

Not everyone gets diagnosed as a child. It's common for people, especially those assigned female at birth, to find out later in life.

Often neurodivergent adults live for years with fatigue, social anxiety, or problems with concentration. Some then choose to pursue a diagnosis, but not everyone does.



Why have a booklet?

Autistic children are 4 times more likely to be transgender or gender questioning. Transgender and gender questioning children are 5 times more likely to have autism or ADHD [1]. Some intersex variations, like Klinefelter Syndrome and Turner's Syndrome, are also linked to higher rates of neurodiversity [2].

But we are not just writing a booklet because being both TNBI and neurodivergent is common. We are writing it because people living with both identities may have unique experiences and face unique challenges, yet to date there are almost no resources out there to support us.



“The key message to take away from this: if you are TNBI and neurodivergent, **you are not alone.**”

What causes this?

The increased prevalence of neurodiversity in TNBI individuals, and vice versa, could be caused by a combination of biological, social and psychological factors. However, so far there is very little high quality research on this.

We asked our TNBI and neurodivergent community members what they thought might cause the overlap:

“Personally I think the question is why do neurotypical people even build these extra social layers of gender anyway?”



“It makes sense to me that neurodivergent people, who often struggle with social norms, struggle with the idea of gender.”

“People always ask what causes TNBI people to be neurodivergent, or what causes neurodivergent people to be TNBI. But it shouldn't matter if there is causality or what direction it is.”



Multiple Identities

What it's like living with these two identities? Here are some experiences from our neurodivergent TNBI community members:



"The experience of being TNBI and neurodivergent is different for everybody. It's okay to be autistic/ADHD and not relate to every single trait. It's okay to be TNBI and not even relate to any gender identity."

"There is such a narrow picture of what autism looks like – the white male maths genius. People assumed I was cisgender and straight. I'm seen by the world as Black first and other identities secondary."

"You can be diagnosed with autism or ADHD at any age, and you can discover your TNBI identity at any age. Sometimes you are so busy figuring out one identity when you are younger, you don't figure out the rest until you are older. It's not a race."

"For people who are TNBI, neurodivergent and also People of Colour, that adds another huge layer."

"A child who is a Person of Colour who struggles in school may be read as 'difficult' due to racism and their autism or ADHD might be missed."



"We have to come out with our multiple identities and people often deny our experiences. Like, 'you can't be trans it's just your autism,' 'you can't be autistic, you are already trans.'"

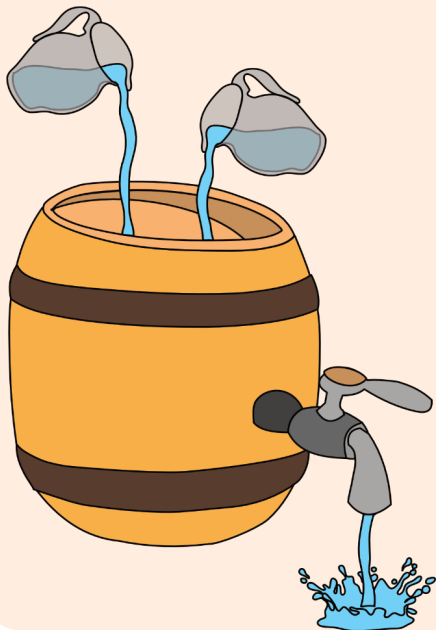
"People negate your second coming out, they can't handle the fact that you have lots of different marginalised identities."

Self-care

Given that we might experience more stress living with two or more marginalised identities, it is even more important for TNBI and neurodivergent people to practice self-care.

Self-care is when we take deliberate action to look after our mental, emotional and physical health.

This might look like managing fatigue (google: spoon theory!), holding space for yourself on a daily basis, educating yourself about your identity and/or diagnoses, and reaching out to the TNBI and/or neurodivergent community.



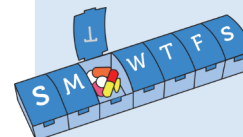
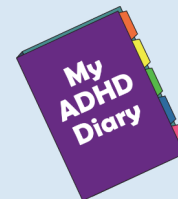
This is the 'stress barrel'. If we let all the things that stress us out build up inside our bodies and brains, the barrel will overflow. We need to learn to open the tap at the bottom, through self-care, to let some of the stress out.

We can also fight to reduce the injustices that led to us experiencing stress in the first place, of course!

Self-care also means working out how to calm ourselves down when we are stressed or distressed.

Autism: coping with sensory overload

1. Remove the trigger - e.g. by turning the lights down or moving somewhere quiet.
2. Learn to spot early warning signs and act quickly to prevent going into a full-blown meltdown
3. Make use of aids that soothe you, like weighted blankets, ear defenders, fidget toys, soft toys.



Preventing ADHD burnout

1. If you tend to get hyperfocussed, make sure you plan breaks into your day to eat, go to the loo, exercise and rest. Set alarms if you have to.
2. If you struggle to focus, split tasks into manageable chunks. Google: pomodoro technique.
3. Make use of aids like pill containers, diaries, daily planners, to-do lists, alarm clocks, wristwatches.

Mental health problems

The consequence of living with minority stress is that TNBI people and neurodivergent people are more at risk of common mental health problems like anxiety and depression than the general population.

Sometimes it can be hard to tell what is going on. For example, being neurodivergent and TNBI can both make you worried about social situations. But when does this worry become an anxiety disorder?



Our top tip is to find a GP or low-cost counsellor who understands, or is willing to educate themselves, about your needs. Someone you can ask for advice. Don't worry if it takes you a few tries to find the right person.

In the bleaker moments of life it feels so unfair. To be neurodivergent in a neurotypical world, to be non-binary in a cisgender world, these are difficult enough, but to be both? It's okay if it's really stressful.

Accessing support

Autism and ADHD are invisible disabilities, meaning that people can't usually see that we are neurodivergent from the outside. This means that people can't see how our neurological differences might impact on us.

This, plus the experience of being TNBI, means we might feel like we constantly have to 'prove' our identities to access support.

However, being trans and being neurodivergent are both protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. This means you have the legal right to access support and not be discriminated against.

Appallingly, being intersex is not yet a protected characteristic. None the less, you are valid and you deserve support and protection from discrimination.



Tips for friends and family

There are times when being TNBI and neurodivergent means we have to 'come out' about our identities to others.

When someone comes out to you they might worry that because of your own upbringing, culture, religion or experiences, you might reject them. Or they might worry that you won't love them anymore.



If you don't know what to say to your loved one, start by telling them you care about them, you will support them, and ask if there is anything that you can do to help them. You don't need to fully understand to be supportive.



To our friends and family, believe us, be nice, support us, ask us what we need. Read about our experience, learn about it, don't expect us to always educate you.



Tips for organisers

If you are hosting an event, you should be aware that some of the people coming might be TNBI and/or neurodivergent. You should make your event as accessible as possible.

Important things to consider are: are there gender neutral and wheelchair accessible bathrooms? Is there a calm quiet space where people can go if it gets too hectic?



"At events, give people the opportunity to send you information about access needs beforehand."



"What I would say to organisers is: think about people with sensory issues. Give people clear instructions. Facilitate smaller groups. Educate yourself about what to do when someone has a shutdown or a meltdown."



What support is there for me?

Brighton-based organisations:

- Switchboard's LGBTQ Disability and Neurodiversity Group: www.switchboard.org.uk/
- For support with neurodivergence:
 - Autism: Assert: www.assertbh.org.uk/
 - ADHD: Brighton ADHD Support Group: email to mail@adhdbrighton.org.uk

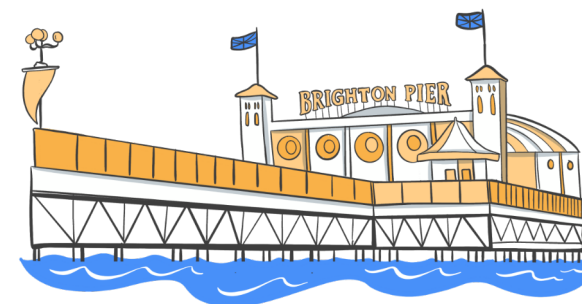
National organisations:



- For support with autism, the National Autistic Society: www.autism.org.uk/
- For support with ADHD, The ADHD Foundation: www.adhdfoundation.org.uk/
- For support for trans people, GIRES: www.gires.org.uk/
- For intersex support, Intersex UK: www.intersexuk.org/

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Booklet available in other formats on request.



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References:

[1] Thrower, E., et al. Prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorder and Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder Amongst Individuals with Gender Dysphoria: A Systematic Review. *J Autism Dev Disord.* 2020; 50: 695–706.

[2] de Vries, A. L., et al. Mental Health of a Large Group of Adults With Disorders of Sex Development in Six European Countries. *Psychosomatic Medicine.* 2019; 81(7), 629–640.

The Clare Project began in 2000 when a group of trans women started meeting in the back room of a hairdressing salon to discuss issues affecting their local community. We are now a registered charity run by and for trans, non-binary and intersex (TNBI) people in Brighton, Hove and East Sussex. We have welcomed thousands of TNBI people through our doors, regardless of their gender identity or expression.

We run support groups, information sessions workshops and socials for local TNBI people as well as providing information and training for individuals and organisations on TNBI community needs. Our contact details are on the last page of this booklet. Please get in touch with us for more information or to access our support. We are here for you.



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