



Neurodiversity-Affirming Language: Our Words Matter!

Neurodiversity-affirming language shifts the focus from "fixing" a student's deficits to supporting their unique brain wiring as a natural human variation. It prioritizes respect for a student's identity and strengths, using terms like "support needs" instead of "functioning labels" to foster a culture of dignity and belonging. **The examples and sentence frames below are not intended to replace formal goal writing but instead should inspire reflection and conversation.** When developing official goals and/or documentation, teams should follow district requirements and seek guidance from district leadership or legal counsel.

Traditional Approach	Affirming Approach	Why it Matters
<i>"Express wants/needs"</i>	<i>"Express themselves (request, comment, share, respond)"</i>	Communication is more than wants and needs, it's connection, identity and joy.
<i>"Transport device with no more than two cues"</i>	<i>"Maintain access to device with support"</i>	Communication access is a right, not a compliance task.
<i>"Will use functional communication"</i>	<i>"Use communication of choice to self-advocate"</i>	Affirms autonomy and self-determination.
<i>"Engage in joint attention"</i>	<i>"Participate in shared engagement with peers/adults during a preferred activity"</i>	Frames interaction as a connection, not a missing skill.



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