

What NOT to Say in ND Conversations

TL;DR · QUICK SUMMARY

- Even well-meaning managers say things that unintentionally shut a conversation down or make someone regret disclosing.
- This guide covers the most common phrases to avoid, and what to say instead.

A Note Before You Read On

This resource offers general guidance and reflects common experience, not professional, legal, medical or financial advice. It is not a substitute for employment law, HR policy, occupational health guidance, or individual professional assessment. Every person's experience of neurodivergence is different, so please adapt anything here to your own situation. The Uniquely Wired Network does not accept liability for decisions, actions or outcomes arising from the use of this material. If you need advice specific to your circumstances, please consult a qualified professional (e.g. HR, legal, medical, or financial advisor).

Why This Matters

A single poorly chosen phrase can undo months of trust-building in seconds.

Most harmful comments come from good intentions, not bad ones — which is exactly why they're worth learning to avoid.

Someone who has a bad experience disclosing once is far less likely to disclose again, to you or anyone else.

What This Might Look Like

- Responding to a disclosure with surprise ("Really? You don't seem it").
- Comparing someone to another ND person you know.
- Asking intrusive questions about diagnosis, medication, or symptoms.

- Reassuring someone by minimising (“We’re all a little ADHD, honestly”).
- Bringing up the disclosure again later in an unrelated, public context

What You Can Do

Avoid: “You don’t seem neurodivergent.”

This isn’t a compliment — it implies masking is working, which isn’t necessarily a good thing.

Instead, simply thank them for sharing and ask what would help.

Avoid: “We’re all a bit like that sometimes.” This minimises a real, often significant difference in how someone experiences work.

Instead, acknowledge the specific thing they’ve told you without comparing it to yourself.

Avoid: Comparing them to someone else you know.

Neurodivergence looks different in every person — comparisons flatten that.

Instead, ask what their individual experience is, rather than assuming it matches someone else’s.

Avoid: Asking for diagnostic detail they haven’t offered.

Questions about specific diagnosis, medication, or symptoms are rarely necessary for you to offer support.

Instead, ask what practical support would help, not what the underlying condition is.

Helpful Phrases You Can Borrow

If you’ve said the wrong thing:

“I’m sorry, that came out wrong — I didn’t mean to minimise it. Can I try again?”

Redirecting your own curiosity appropriately:

“I don’t need any details you don’t want to share, you’re welcome to just tell me what would be most useful from me.”

Quick Tips

- You don’t seem ND” is never a compliment — avoid it entirely.
- Don’t minimise with “we’re all a bit like that.”
- Don’t compare someone to another ND person you know.
- Don’t ask for diagnostic or medical detail they haven’t offered.
- If you slip up, a quick honest correction is better than pretending it didn’t happen.
- Silence and a follow-up question beat an awkward reassurance.

Want to Know More?

- See our companion guide: “How to Open ND Conversations” for getting the start right.
- See “Confidentiality & Trust” for handling what’s said afterwards.
- See “Team Education Tools” for building this awareness more widely.

Before You Go

Nobody gets every word right — what matters is noticing, correcting, and doing better next time.

A genuine, humble correction usually rebuilds more trust than a perfectly worded first attempt.