

What is an “NT” aka “Neuro-typical?”

We often tend to focus on the challenges associated with the autism spectrum, using generalities to describe a population that is highly diverse. Rarely do we discuss what it means to be a person *without* ASD, (sometimes called “neuro-typical,” or “allistic,” although we can assume there is really no such thing as a typical neurology.) Following are a list of characteristics of so-called “NTs”:

- NTs make up most of the population, so they are everywhere around you.
- They appear to somehow naturally “know” how to handle new social situations, though they mess it up pretty frequently too.
- The majority of their communication (approximately 80%) is **non-verbal**. In other words, 80% of what they get from your communication is coming from your facial expression, body position and tone of voice, NOT from the words you say.
- They usually insist on “small talk,” and require it before engaging in more interesting, in-depth conversations. This makes them feel safe.
- NTs tend to be better at “top down thinking.” They start with big ideas and then gather data to support it rather than the other way around. They often seem to have little patience for gathering all the data.
- Similarly, NTs tend to be better at understanding emotions and empathizing than at understanding systems and patterns. For example, they are usually very good at inferring what others are thinking, and understanding the “big picture.” They are perhaps not so good at reading instruction manuals, understanding maps, or paying attention to the details of processes.
- NT’s often use abstract language, metaphors, generalizations, sarcasm and hyperbole to communicate things that could easily be said more directly.
- NT’s often do not say what they are really thinking. They are extremely worried about what you (or others) are thinking and feeling, so it is often hard for NTs to be honest. Compliments are given as a means of validating a person and showing that they like the person—even if they are not true. For example, they might say, “Your new outfit looks great!” even when it clearly doesn’t.
- NTs make assumptions all the time. Even though they are good at guessing how others are feeling and thinking, they also will guess wrong--sometimes making inferences about how you think about them. For example, if you tell them their coat is bright or the sleeves are a little

short, they may interpret it as “I think you look ugly I *and I do not like you as a person.*” They usually assume that you think like they do, and are not simply telling it like it is.

- When they do infer the wrong things, they often will not believe you when you tell them that they are wrong. They often trust their intuition more than your words.
- NT's often express many different emotions, and may even change moods dramatically, but they usually are able to control strong feelings (especially anger) and typically avoid extreme emotional “blow-ups” or “meltdowns.”
- Both NTs and neurodiverse people “mask” to get along with others. The difference is that putting on the mask doesn't seem to bother NTs.
- They typically present themselves in a happy, positive manner as they go about their days, even if they are not feeling happy at all. They may have a “public” face that they “wear” unless they are with people emotionally close to them. If you are close to them, they may even expect you to know when and how their inner emotions are different from what they are presenting on the outside.
- NT's typically like to be touched, and use touch as a way of demonstrating their feelings toward each other. They use touch casually to greet friends, family and even casual acquaintances. They may become sad if they do not experience regular touch from others.
- NT's need a great deal of emotional support from others. They typically like to discuss their problems with family and friends, although they often do not want to hear suggestions for solutions. Without this emotional support they may feel lonely or sad.
- They also like to affirm the status of their relationships in a variety of ways. Sometimes they like to discuss it directly (and repeatedly) in words, other times they expect certain ritual behaviors from significant others to show them that they are still loved or appreciated. For example, a gift on an anniversary, or a surprise gift may help them to understand that you still love them, even though it is obvious given you are still in the relationship!
- Usually NT's are not overly stressed by sensory experiences such as loud noises, intense smells etc.
- Most NT's have a strong awareness of how their bodies feel on the inside. They know if they are hungry, tired, cold, hot, sick, disgusted, excited, anxious, sad, annoyed, angry, etc. They often enjoy talking about the emotions that they experience.
- NT's are typically able to manage their activities by planning ahead, keeping track of time and belongings, and other “executive function” tasks. They may not be so good at sticking with a project to achieve mastery, or focusing intently on a subject without distraction.