DEFICIT VS. AFFIRMING LANGUAGE: QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

LANGUAGE THAT MINIMISES AUTISM

PHRASE	WHAT IT IMPLIES	AFFIRMING SHIFT
"He doesn't look or seem autistic."	Autism only presents one recognisable way, and being visibly autistic would be a problem.	Being autistic does not need to be hidden or visible in a specific way to be valid.
"Everyone is autistic nowadays."	Rising diagnosis rates mean autism is just a trend.	More scouts, especially those historically overlooked, are finally being recognised.
"Autistic people have superpowers!"	Autism is only worth valuing when it comes with an exceptional talent.	Admiration lands best when it is specific to the scout's own interests or strengths.
"There is nothing wrong with her."	Acknowledging autism at all would be an insult, so it feels safer to deny it.	Support needs are real and autism is not a defect. Both can be true at the same time.

LANGUAGE THAT DENIES THE NEED FOR SUPPORT

PHRASE	WHAT IT IMPLIES	AFFIRMING SHIFT
"He is high functioning."	How closely a scout's presentation aligns with neurotypical expectations indicates how much support they need.	Name the specific support needed instead, such as executive functioning support, so it can actually be met.

social cipher

LANGUAGE THAT DENIES THE NEED FOR SUPPORT (CON'T)

PHRASE	WHAT IT IMPLIES	AFFIRMING SHIFT
"The real world won't make these accommodations."	Accommodations disappear after childhood ends, so withholding them now prepares a scout for adulthood.	Workplaces, uni, and public spaces often provide accommodations too. The goal is to teach self-advocacy.
"They don't need accommodations. They just need to manage their time/be more organised."	The scout lacks effort or self-discipline and does not have a genuine support need.	Time management and organisation are executive functioning skills. The scout needs support building them, like any other skill.

LANGUAGE THAT ASSUMES INTENT INSTEAD OF NEED

PHRASE	WHAT IT IMPLIES	AFFIRMING SHIFT
"She's just doing this for attention."	The behavior is manipulative and should be dismissed.	Attention is a real need. Figure out what connection, reassurance, or help the scout is asking for.
"She's having a tantrum because she didn't get her way."	The scout is choosing to fake distress to get a desired outcome.	A meltdown is an involuntary nervous system response that calls for support rather than a consequence.
"He is a problem."	The behaviour reflects a fixed part of who the scout is.	Focus on what the specific behaviour is trying to communicate so it can be addressed.
"He just needs more discipline at home."	Activity behaviour reflects a scout's upbringing rather than something happening at scouts	Look at triggers, such as transitions or sensory load, before assuming the cause is at home.

social cipher