



**Changing childhoods.  
Changing lives.**

# **Everyone deserves a friend**



**Suitable for children aged 4+**



Welcomes YOU to their  
world of adventures!



This story is written and produced by the Dog, Duck and Cat Trust & Barnardo's.

It was developed with incredible children across the Black Country as part of the Black Country ICB Partnership for Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS) Project 2024-2025.

Special thanks to all the children and adults, who helped shape this story and gave Mal his voice.

# Everyone deserves a friend

Are you sitting comfortably?  
Then let's begin...



In a town, not too far from here,  
lived a Dog, a Duck and a Cat. They were the best  
of friends and always looked out for each other,  
because that is what good friends do!





Something wonderful has happened to Duck, he has made a new friend. His new friend has moved in next door to Duck's house along with his Mom and Dad.

He's a duck as well, his name is Mal. Now whilst he is a duck, he doesn't look much like our friend Duck, as he is another type of feathered friend that is called a Mallard.

Mal is a mix of wonderful colours. His feathers are green and brown and beige and he looks proper dapper I'm sure you'll all agree! And, that's why he's called Mal, because he's a mallard duck.



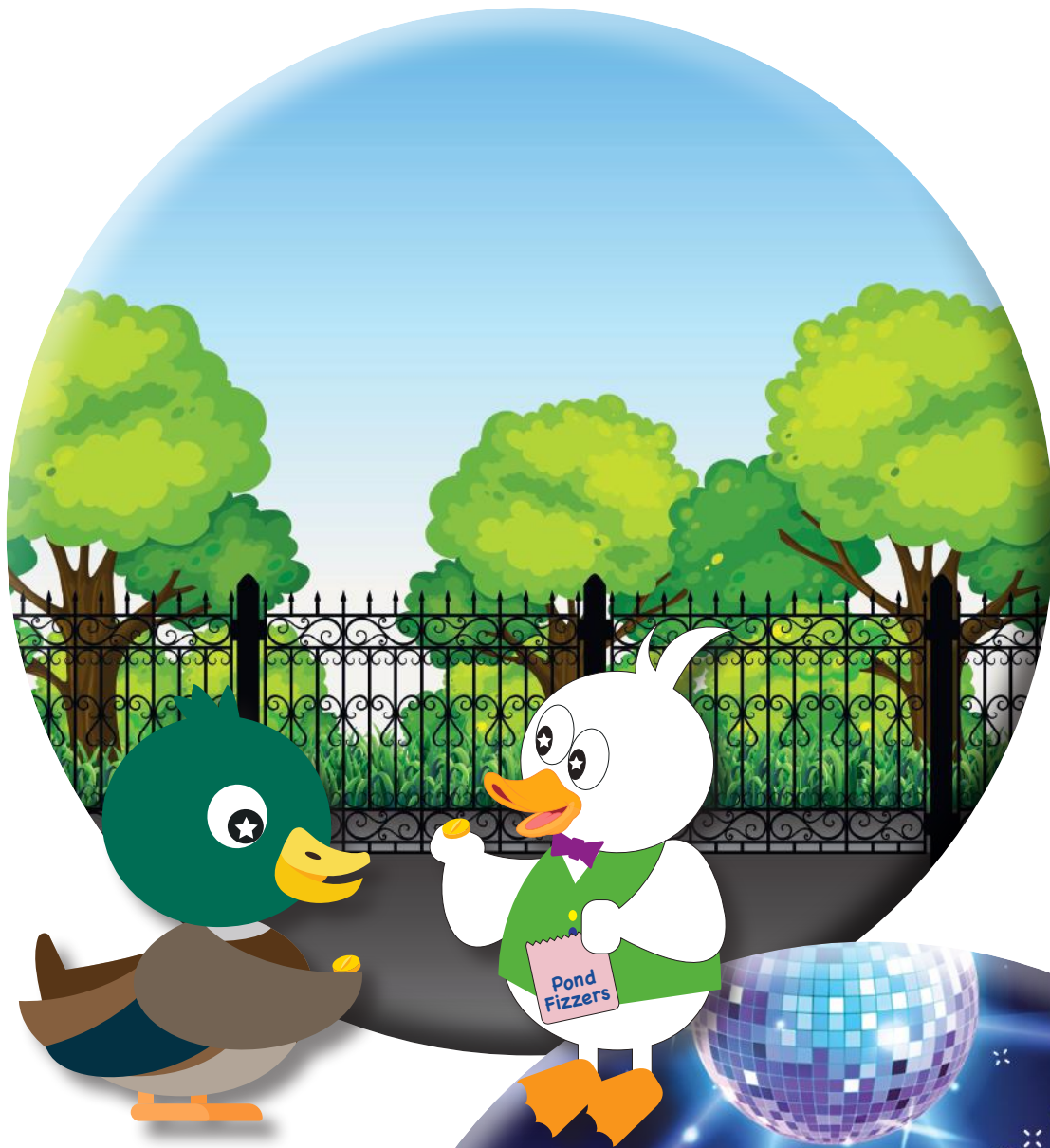
Duck and Mal met each other in the summer holidays when Mal moved in and he will be going to Farmyard Lane Primary, along with Duck and all his friends.

Now as we all know, we are all different.  
We might be a lot like  
someone else, but we  
are not the same,  
as we are all  
unique.



Mal and Duck  
were a lot alike in  
many ways though:

- ★ They both liked football.
- ★ They both liked pond fizzers, their favourite sweets.
- ★ They also both liked to have a little dance and shake their tail feathers.





One difference they had was that Mal is autistic.

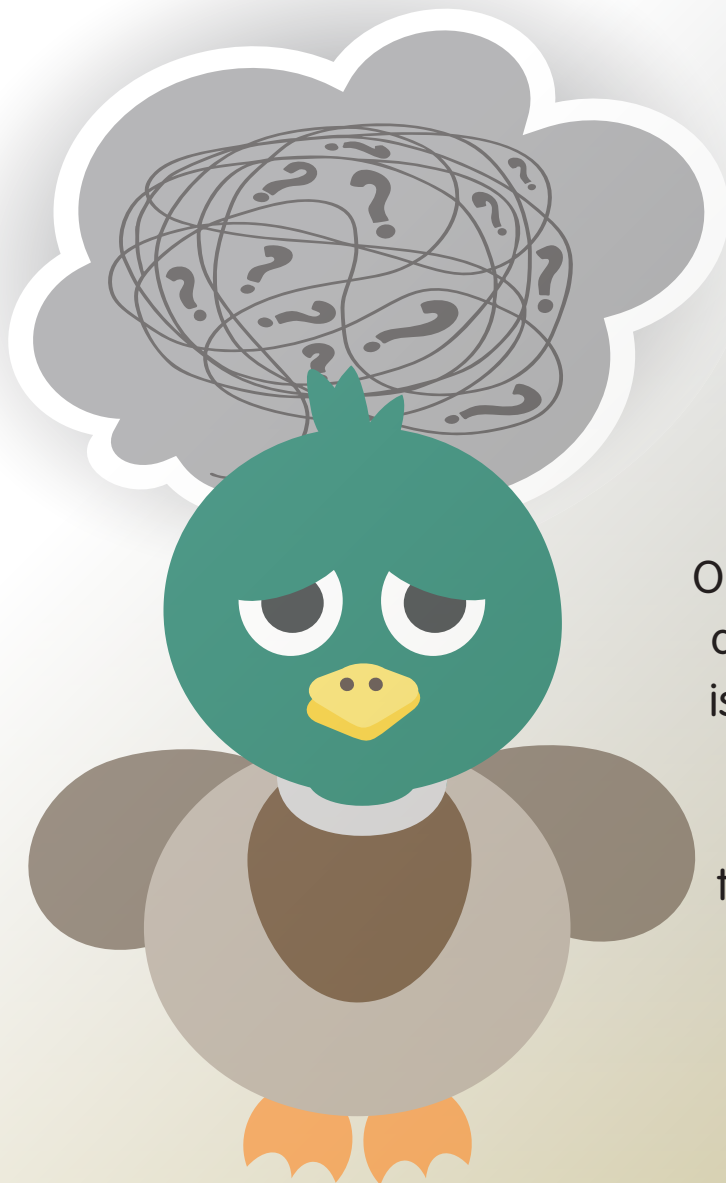
What that meant for Mal was that he needed to do things in his life a little differently to Duck. Instead of me trying to explain that to you all I'll share with you how Mal explained it to Duck, straight out of his beak!

'Thanks for being so interested in my autism Duck,' said Mal, 'I sometimes feel like animals are a bit scared to ask me about it because they think it might upset me, but I am happy to talk about it as I am comfortable with it and I just think of it as a part of me now. I didn't always feel so good about it though.'

When the doctor helped me understand I was autistic, and explained it to me and Mom, I was still quite scared and worried as I didn't know properly what it meant.

So, me and Mom did some research and found out more about my autism. We discovered it was nothing to be scared of at all, it was just part of who I was and had always been.'





'I do have to do things a bit different from you Duck, and sometimes I might need a bit of help too. It's not special treatment though, it's just so I can be as equal as everyone else.

One of the things that sometimes affects me is noise. When there is lots of noise going on around me, I often get really upset as I can find it overwhelming; that means that I don't feel like I can handle the situation as I would like to.'

'This used to scare me, but now when I feel overwhelmed by noise, I put on my ear defenders which drowns out the noise. And as soon as I do that, I start to feel calm again.

Knowing that if the noise gets too much for me, I have a way to deal with it, makes me feel more in control and that is brilliant!'





'I learnt that this was not me getting special treatment,  
it's essential if I want to be happy and be able to get  
on with my day!'



'Now crazy as this might sound Duck, I tried to hide my autism for a while, and I tried to pretend I didn't need any extra help or support.

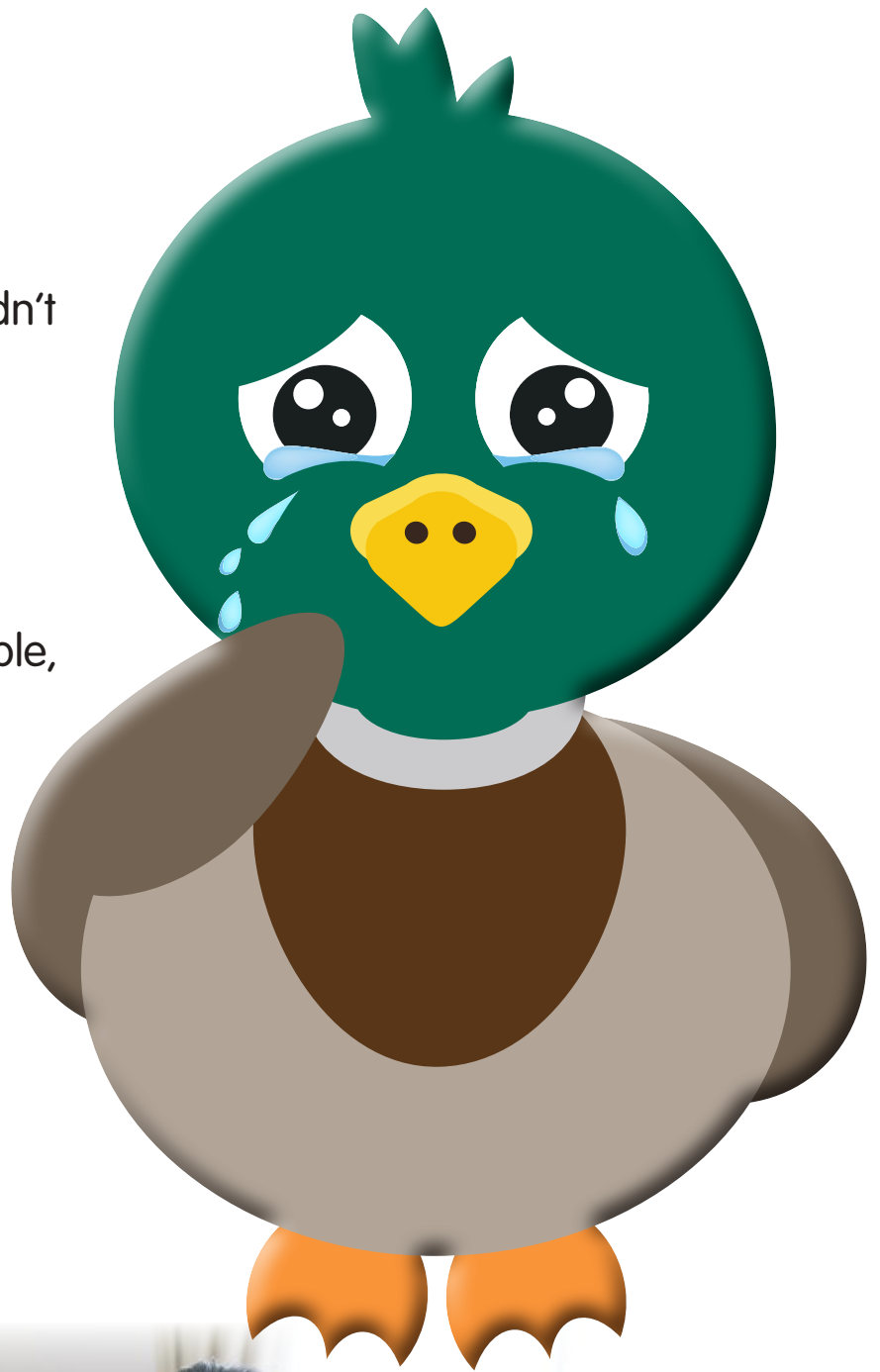
I'd stay away from other animals so they wouldn't know that I was a bit different to them, and because I stayed away from them, they stayed away from me too.'



'That made me feel very lonely and sad, and I didn't really have any friends.

But I learnt that I didn't need to hide my autism at all. It turns out that lots of animals and people, need a bit of help in their lives!

It might be help with reading, or writing, or maths.'





'It might be help with understanding things, making friends, or getting along with other people.'



# Being different. is OK!

'When I understood that, I found it easier to talk to others. When I did tell other animals about my autism, I found they weren't that bothered, it was just part of who I was, it didn't stop me being fun and interesting and I learnt that being different from others is ok.'





'I learnt that we are all unique, it's just that my uniqueness needs a bit of extra support so I can be equal to everyone else.

But I also want to mention this Duck, as I feel it's very important. I'm different from you, but also from others with autism too, because we autistic animals and people, are all unique as well.'





'The best advice I can give anyone is just ask an animal or person how they would like to be treated. If you ask then that's the start of finding out how you can get along with someone and be their friend, because everyone deserves a friend.'

**If you do that  
it doesn't matter what an  
animal or person might need or  
want, if you talk to them and  
ask them, they'll be able to tell  
you, so you don't  
get it wrong!**

**That means  
you don't need to fear  
animals or people who are  
different, because if we talk  
to each other, we all learn  
how we can best get along  
and have happy  
days together.**



‘And, if you do have autism,  
or anything that makes  
you a bit different, don’t be  
scared!

EVERYONE is different, but  
that doesn’t have to stop  
you having fun and getting  
along with others.

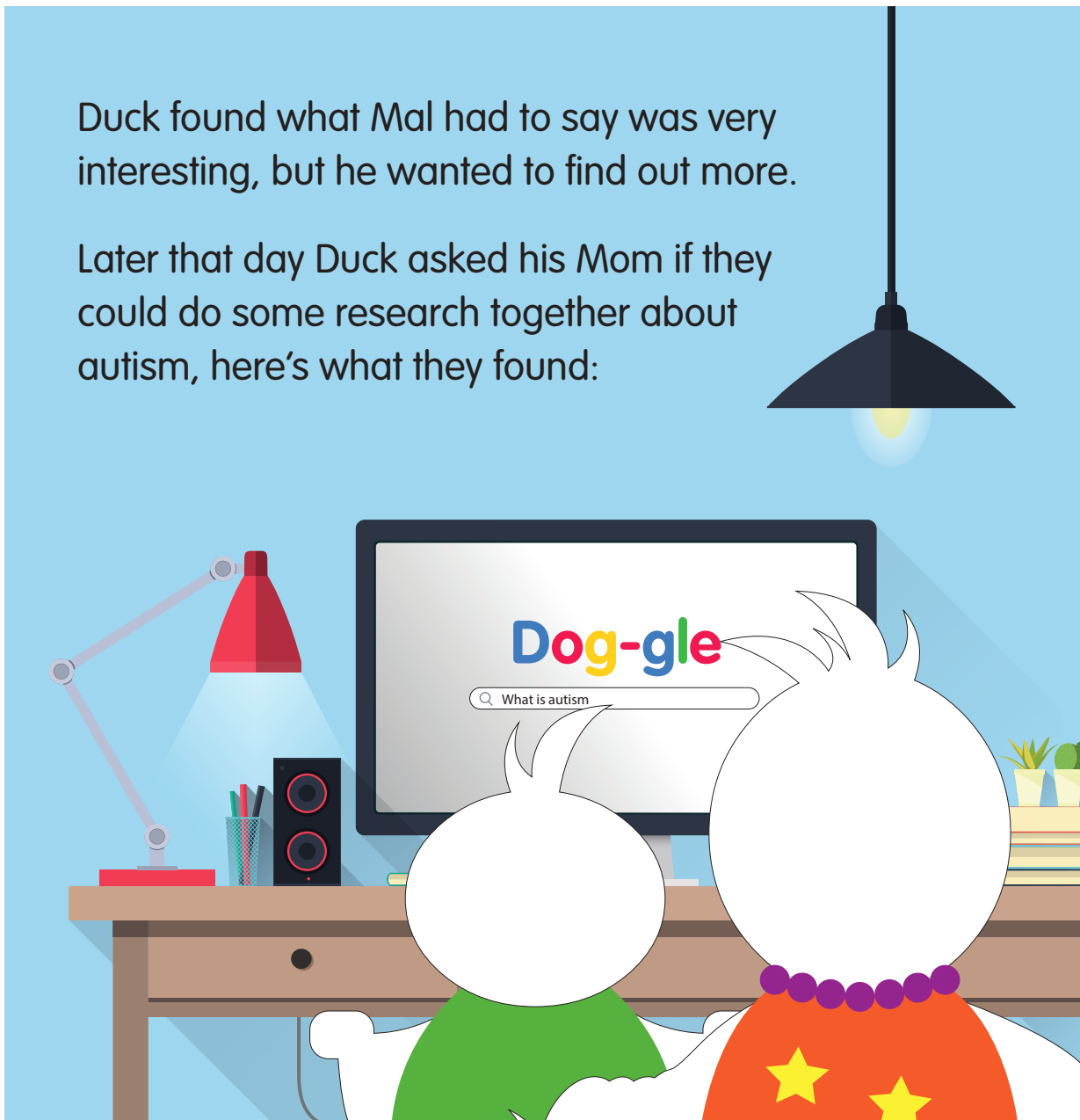
It just might mean you need  
a bit of help to do this.’

BE KIND  
— to —  
YOURSELF



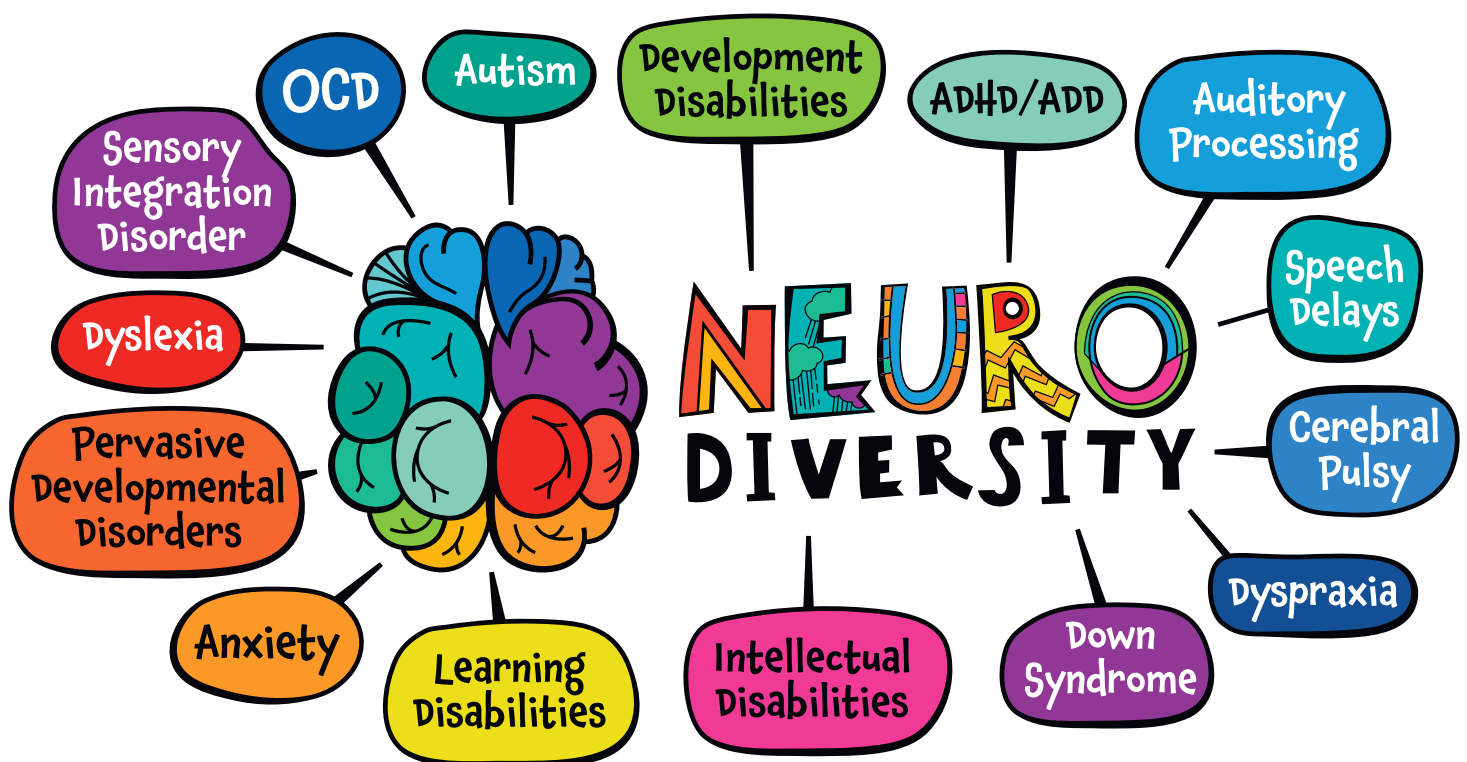
Duck found what Mal had to say was very interesting, but he wanted to find out more.

Later that day Duck asked his Mom if they could do some research together about autism, here's what they found:



- **Mal has autism - that's a neurodivergent condition, so he is classed as neurodiverse**
- **But, autism is not the only neurodivergent condition**
- **Autism (also known as autism spectrum disorder or ASD for short), ADHD and dyslexia, are the most common neurodivergent conditions**
- **It's all about knowing how we can best support others who are neurodiverse**

- It's about knowing and understanding, but also about doing things in the real world that can help someone who is neurodiverse
- Sometimes we need to do or change things in our world to help neurodivergent folks get what they need too
- The big thing is about asking an individual what THEY need. If we ask, and they tell us, then we can all help each other to be the best we can be
- And, individuals without any neurodivergent conditions are called neurotypical





Duck realised that neurodiversity affected a lot of animals, and people, without him realising.

He knew, for example, Chicken in his class was dyslexic but he didn't really know what that meant until now.

He hadn't asked Chicken about it, ever, because he wasn't sure if he should, and he didn't want to upset her!





He remembered sometimes being a bit jealous she got extra help in class, but now understood that it wasn't extra help, just help needed for her to be able to do the same things he could do.

Duck felt a bit silly, and guilty, about how he had acted and felt towards Chicken.



So he decided on some new rules for himself starting right away:

# My Rules!

★ He would always ask another animal how they would like to be treated by him, no matter who they were

★ If he knew that someone was neurodivergent, he would try his best to make sure he did what was needed to make them feel good in his company and supported by him

★ He would make sure his friends Dog and Cat knew about neurodivergence, because when we know about things it can make them less scary



Duck loved making new friends, and he knew this set of rules would help him in doing that, so he couldn't wait to put them into action!





Mal was over the moon he'd made a new friend. It meant that when he started school he would already know someone, and that someone would also know he was autistic.

That meant Duck could help him explain his neurodivergence to the other animals, and what that meant for him, and then they could all get on with making friends with each other and having lots of fun!



There's lots more...

Have a look at all our stories and activities, there's  
lots for you to enjoy!

Here are some of the other characters you will get  
to meet!

