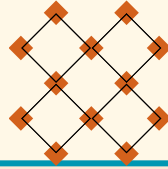


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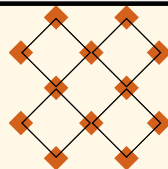
Your Community Mental Health and Wellbeing Charity



Queerwell's Neurodivergent and Trauma-Informed Guide to Pride 2026



By Charlotte Channey



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Pride began as a protest, led by people often pushed aside by society. Being yourself, queer and neurodivergent, is part of that tradition. This toolkit is here to help neurodivergent people handle the big, loud, and sometimes unpredictable events at Pride.

Pride is on 4th July — plan ahead to make the most of the day; for travel info and full details, visit [Pride in London](#).



Things to find out

- The parade is a slow procession, not a brisk walk, so expect frequent stops and starts.
- If you are marching with an organisation, find your group's exact assembly point and the time you need to be there, how to reach out to them, where the group plans to finish and disperse, and whether there is a meeting point afterwards.
- Whether there is a quieter spot in the line-up (edges and the back are often calmer than the middle).



Plan your energy

- Account for the journey in, the long wait, the march itself, the noise and heat, and the journey home and then plan for less, not more.
- If a friend's after-party feels too much, it is reasonable to skip it.
- It is worth considering what you do in the days leading up to Pride, the day itself and the day after when planning your energy and protecting your recovery.



Your sensory tool-kit

Pack your bag the night before, when things are quiet, and use the checklist below to help.

Sensory and regulation



- Ear defenders, earplugs or loop-style filters.
- Sunglasses and a hat or cap.
- Comfort stim item (chewable, fidget, soft object).
- Tinted lenses or a peaked cap to cut visual glare.
- A familiar scent, if smells help ground you.

Body and comfort

- Water – more than you think you need
- Snacks: safe/ familiar foods.
- Sunscreen and any regular medication
- Layers – it can swing from hot sun to cool wind
- Comfortable, broken-in shoes (lots of standing).



Communication and Safety



- Charged phone + power bank and cable.
- Communication card (see next section).
- Quick-Reference Card/photo of it on your phone.
- Small cash and a contactless card.
- Any access documentation you usually carry

Calm and Recovery



- Headphones with calming audio or a playlist.
- A written reminder of your exit plan.
- Wet wipes/tissues and hand sanitiser.
- A small comfort item from home.
- A sealable bag to keep things dry.



Managing sensory load

Overload usually gives you some warning, but it's easy to miss the signs. Some common early signs are feeling more irritable, having trouble understanding what people say, feeling distant or 'foggy', a tight feeling in your chest, wanting to leave, or becoming very quiet.



Think ahead about what you'll do if you notice these signs—maybe step aside, use ear protection, text a friend, or take a short break.



During the march

- Stand where you feel comfortable. The edge of the group gives you more space and makes it easier to step out if you need to.
- Put on your ear protection before the sound systems start.
- Keep drinking water and look for shade whenever the march stops.
- Feel free to stim, flap, rock, fidget, and pace - all are welcome here.
- If you need to drop out, tell your buddy and step sideways out of the line rather than stopping when things start to feel intense.

At pride, you're surrounded by people who understand.



Some grounding exercises

- If you start to feel overwhelmed, try a grounding exercise. Name **five** things you can see, **four** you can feel, **three** you can hear, **two** you can smell, and **one** you can taste.
- You can also press your feet into the ground and breathe out longer than you breathe in. Move toward the quietest edge you can find.



Remember, grounding is easier when things are quieter.

Communication tools

When you are overloaded, having phrases ready – or something you can point to – means you can still get your needs met when speech is hard or gone entirely.

A few phrases you can use:

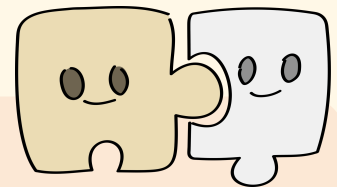
- “I need a quiet moment – I’m not upset with you.”
- “I can’t talk right now, but I’m okay. Give me a few minutes.”
- “I’m getting overloaded and need to step out. Can you come with me / can you carry on without me?”
- “I need to leave now. I’ll message when I’m home.”

Take a pride buddy

- A pride buddy might be a friend or family member who is attending with you. If you are marching with an organisation, ask them if they can pair you with a buddy, if that would make it easier for you.
- Tell them what helps and what does not when you are overloaded, so their instinct to comfort does not accidentally add pressure.

When it gets overwhelming

- Allow yourself to react. Trying to hold back a meltdown or shutdown often makes it last longer and feel worse.
- When you start to feel better, find out where the quieter spots are, like side streets, a café, or a quiet area if the event has one.



Permission to leave

You do not owe anyone an explanation, a goodbye round, or 'just one more hour'. Telling your buddy and heading home is a complete and reasonable choice at any point in the day.

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Remember, there is no right or wrong way to celebrate Pride, only the right or wrong way for YOU to celebrate!

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Boundaries and safety

- Remember, you can say no to hugs and ask not to be in photos. You never have to let anyone into your personal space.
- If you choose to drink alcohol, take it slow and have water with you. Don't force yourself to act like everything is fine all day.
- Carry your Quick-Reference Card, so you have your important information even if your phone is not working or is not charged.



Recovery

After a big sensory or social event, try to plan for it instead of letting it catch you off guard.

- Clear your schedule after the event and try to keep the evening and, if possible, the next day free.
- Plan a low-demand transition home: familiar route, headphones, minimal talking.
- Line up your decompression in advance: dim light, a shower, a weighted blanket, a familiar show, and silence.
- Eat and rehydrate, even if your appetite is off after a long day.

On Sunday, 5th July, Queerwell will be running a relaxed Sunday Sanctuary at the Highbury Counselling Centre. Please keep an eye on Queerwell's [website](#) for further details.

My pride information

My Buddy	
Buddy's Phone Number	
Assembly Point and Time	
My Journey Route	
Backup Exits	
My Early Signs of Overload and What Helps Me	
Emergency Contact	
Other Useful Information	

Sensory and Regulation	
Body and Comfort	
Communication and Safety	
Recovery	

Useful links:

[Queerwell](#)

[Pride in London](#)

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**Remember, however you mark Pride 2026,
enjoy celebrating who you are!**

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HAPPY

PRIDE



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Charity number: 1210152

Design: Amulya Divakar

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