01 / NOTICE YOUR PATTERNS

Different Minds at Work

A guide to understanding your strengths, managing barriers, and finding conditions that help you thrive.

Neurodivergence describes differences in how people think, learn, focus, communicate or process information. It can include ADHD, autism, dyslexia and other experiences. There is no single neurodivergent way of working - and no single solution that works for everyone.

THE CENTRAL IDEA

You do not have to change who you are to discover new ways of working. Start by noticing what helps, what gets in the way, and what support makes a difference. Don't be afraid to try different approaches.

What helps me do my best work?

Check any ideas that sound like you. Add your own - these are possibilities, not assumptions.

FOCUS + ENERGY

- ☐ A quieter environment
- ☐ Movement or short breaks
- ☐ Someone working nearby
- ☐ Headphones or fewer alerts
- ☐ A specific time of day

CLARITY + COMMUNICATION

- ☐ Written instructions
- ☐ Examples of a finished task
- ☐ Clear priorities and deadlines
- ☐ Time to think before replying
- ☐ Specific, constructive feedback

PACE + PLANNING

- ☐ Smaller steps and milestones
- ☐ Time to prepare for changes
- ☐ A short, scheduled check-in
- ☐ A visual plan or task list
- ☐ Time between different tasks

STRENGTHS I BRING

- ☐ Creative ideas or new angles
- ☐ Attention to detail or patterns
- ☐ Persistence with meaningful work
- ☐ Curiosity and willingness to learn
- ☐ Seeing the bigger picture

My work style, in my words

I do my best work when...

One situation that can make work harder is...

A change or support I would like to try is...

Pathways Employment Help Centre

From Stuck to Started

When beginning a task feels difficult, experiment with a small change rather than blaming yourself.

> **BEFORE CALLING IT PROCRASTINATION**
>
> Ask: Is the task unclear? Too big? Emotionally difficult? Am I overloaded, distracted or in need of support? These experiences can overlap - identifying the barrier helps you choose a next step.

Five strategies worth trying

01 **Make the first step tiny**

Swap “finish my resume” for “open the file and update my most recent job.”

02 **Make the next action visible**

Write your next action on a sticky note beside your computer or as a notification on a phone or calendar app.

03 **Try body doubling**

Work quietly beside another person, in person or on video. Agree on a short work period and check-in with one another.

04 **Allow an imperfect first try**

Make a rough outline, messy notes or a first attempt. You can improve it later.

05 **Remove one obstacle**

Gather materials, mute an alert, change your workspace or ask what “finished” looks like.

Try it with a real task

A task I want to start:

What is making this task difficult to start?:

My first two-minute step:

When I will try it / what support I could use:

Tip: If a strategy does not help, that is useful information - not a personal failure.

03 / ASK FOR WHAT HELPS

Make Work Work for You

How to explain what helps you do your best work, without leading with a label or diagnosis.

Start with the work itself: what is difficult, what would help, and one change worth trying. You can have this conversation without first calling it an “accommodation” or naming a diagnosis.

Everyday ways to ask

WHEN PRIORITIES ARE UNCLEAR

“Could we agree on the most important task for today - and what can wait?”

WHEN INSTRUCTIONS ARE EASY TO MISS

“Could you send the key steps in writing? A short checklist helps me follow through.”

WHEN DISTRACTIONS INTERRUPT FOCUS

“Could we find a quieter workspace or schedule an uninterrupted focus period?”

WHEN A LARGE TASK FEELS VAGUE

“Could we break this into chunks and set a check-in partway through?”

A simple way to start the conversation

> **KEEP IT SPECIFIC AND PRACTICAL**
>
> “I work best when [describe situation]. I am finding [specific part] difficult. Could we try [practical change]?”

My next conversation

The situation I want to improve:

The change I could ask for:

Who I will speak with / when:

About privacy and support: You can describe what helps you work without sharing a diagnosis. If you need disability-related accommodation, an employer may seek relevant information about your functional needs, but should respect the privacy of your medical information.

04 / NOTICE WHAT AFFECTS YOU

Understanding My Sensory Needs

A shorter sensory check-in and a quick reset for overwhelm

Sound, light, movement and busy environments can affect comfort, focus and task initiation. When you feel stuck, it may help to ask whether you need a sensory adjustment, a clearer next step, or a short reset.

NOTICE, DO NOT JUDGE

Sometimes the challenge is not motivation. It may be too much input, too many demands, or uncertainty about what to do first.

1 Quick sensory snapshot

For each area, check what feels most true lately. More than one answer is fine.

SOUND Music, voices, sudden noise	☐ I often need less ☐ I often seek more	☐ It depends on the day ☐ I am not sure yet
LIGHT Brightness, glare, flicker	☐ I often need less ☐ I often seek more	☐ It depends on the day ☐ I am not sure yet
MOVEMENT Sitting still, walking, fidgeting	☐ I often need less ☐ I often seek more	☐ It depends on the day ☐ I am not sure yet
TOUCH + SPACE Clothing, textures, crowds	☐ I often need less ☐ I often seek more	☐ It depends on the day ☐ I am not sure yet
SOCIAL ACTIVITY Groups, interruptions, busy places	☐ I often need less ☐ I often seek more	☐ It depends on the day ☐ I am not sure yet

2 Supports worth trying

WHEN I FEEL OVERWHELMED

☐ Change rooms ☐ Reduce noise
☐ Soften light ☐ Take a short break

WHEN I NEED MORE STIMULATION

☐ Stretch or walk ☐ Fidget
☐ Familiar music ☐ Move around

3 When overwhelm hits

Before calling it procrastination, ask what is making the moment hard.

NOTICE THE SIGNALS

☐ Racing thoughts
☐ Switching tasks
☐ Tension or fatigue

WHAT MAY BE ADDING TO THE MENTAL LOAD?

☐ Unclear expectations
☐ Too many steps
☐ Pressure to do it perfectly

PICK A RESET THAT FITS

☐ Reduce the stimulation
☐ Name one first step
☐ Borrow structure: body double or check-in

You do not need to solve everything at once. A small change in the environment, the task, or the level of support can make a real difference.