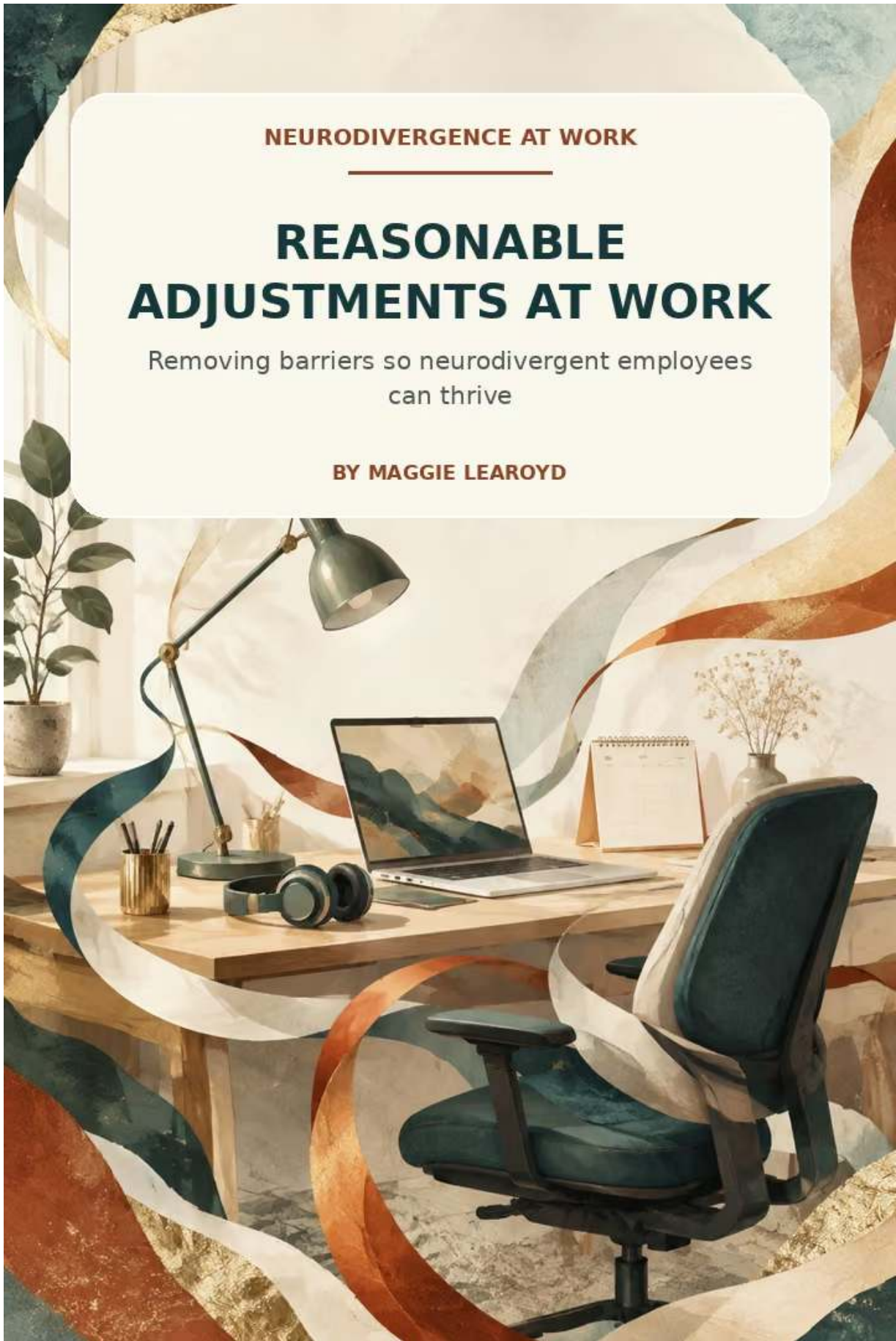


NEURODIVERGENCE AT WORK

REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS AT WORK

Removing barriers so neurodivergent employees
can thrive

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Reasonable Adjustments at Work

Removing barriers so neurodivergent employees can thrive

Every employee deserves the opportunity to work in an environment where they can perform at their best. However, workplaces are not always designed with neurological differences in mind. Processes, communication styles, office layouts and traditional ways of working may unintentionally create barriers for neurodivergent employees.

Reasonable adjustments are one of the most effective ways of reducing these barriers. They are practical changes that help employees access work, carry out their role effectively and participate fully in the workplace. Importantly, reasonable adjustments are not about giving someone an unfair advantage—they are about creating a fair opportunity by removing unnecessary obstacles.

Many adjustments are simple, inexpensive and beneficial for the wider workforce. Clear communication, flexible working and accessible technology often improve productivity for everyone, not just neurodivergent employees.

Creating an inclusive workplace begins by recognising that equality does not always mean treating everyone exactly the same. Sometimes fairness means providing different forms of support so that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed.

What Are Reasonable Adjustments?

Reasonable adjustments are changes to the workplace, working practices or recruitment processes that reduce disadvantages experienced by disabled employees, including many neurodivergent people.

The purpose of an adjustment is to remove barriers rather than change the individual.

Adjustments should always be:

- Practical.

Individualised.

Collaborative.

Proportionate.

Reviewed regularly.

No two neurodivergent employees are the same, so adjustments should never be based solely on a diagnosis.

The Equality Act 2010

In the UK, the Equality Act 2010 places a legal duty on employers to consider reasonable adjustments where an employee is disabled under the Act, including many people with neurodevelopmental conditions such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia or dyspraxia where the legal definition is met.

The aim is to reduce substantial disadvantages that arise because of workplace practices or environments.

Reasonable adjustments are not optional acts of kindness—they are an important part of creating fair and inclusive workplaces.

Why Adjustments Matter

Without appropriate adjustments, neurodivergent employees may experience:

- Increased stress.

Reduced confidence.

Lower productivity.

Fatigue.

Sensory overload.

Difficulty meeting expectations that could otherwise be achieved.

Increased sickness absence.

Burnout.

Appropriate adjustments often improve both wellbeing and performance.

When barriers are removed, employees are better able to use their strengths and contribute effectively.

There Is No "One-Size-Fits-All" Solution

A diagnosis does not automatically determine what support someone needs.

For example:

- Two autistic employees may have completely different sensory preferences.

One employee with ADHD may benefit from regular check-ins, while another prefers greater independence.

The most effective approach is to ask the employee what helps them work well.

Simple questions include:

- What aspects of work do you find most challenging?

What helps you work at your best?

Are there any adjustments that would make your role easier?

Listening is often the most valuable adjustment of all.

Communication Adjustments

Communication is one of the most common areas where small changes make a significant difference.

Helpful adjustments may include:

- Providing written instructions after meetings.

Breaking large tasks into smaller steps.

Using clear, direct language.

Avoiding unnecessary ambiguity.

Confirming priorities.

Allowing additional processing time.

Providing agendas before meetings.

Summarising actions at the end of discussions.

Clear communication benefits every employee, regardless of whether they identify as neurodivergent.

Environmental Adjustments

The physical workplace can significantly influence concentration, wellbeing and productivity.

Possible adjustments include:

- Noise-cancelling headphones.

Quiet working spaces.

Desk location away from busy walkways.

Adjustable lighting where possible.

Reduced visual distractions.

Flexible seating arrangements.

Permission to use sensory tools.

Even small environmental changes can reduce fatigue and improve focus.

Flexible Working Arrangements

Flexibility often allows neurodivergent employees to work in ways that maximise productivity.

Examples include:

- Flexible start and finish times.

Hybrid working.

Home working where appropriate.

Flexible break times.

Alternative working patterns.

Adjusted meeting schedules.

The focus should remain on achieving outcomes rather than enforcing unnecessary routines.

Supporting Executive Functioning

Many neurodivergent employees experience differences in executive functioning.

This may affect:

- Planning.

Organisation.

Prioritisation.

Time management.

Working memory.

Task initiation.

Helpful adjustments include:

- Shared task lists.

Visual planners.

Calendar reminders.

Project management software.

Clear deadlines.

Regular supervision.

Breaking complex work into manageable stages.

These strategies often improve productivity for entire teams.

Assistive Technology

Technology can provide valuable workplace support.

Examples include:

- Speech-to-text software.

Text-to-speech readers.

Mind mapping software.

Digital planners.

Reminder apps.

Coloured screen filters.

Grammar and spelling support.

Noise management technology.

Choosing the right technology should always reflect individual needs.

Meetings and Training

Meetings can present challenges for some neurodivergent employees.

Helpful adjustments include:

- Sending agendas in advance.

Clearly defining objectives.

Allowing processing time.

Providing written notes afterwards.

Offering virtual attendance where appropriate.

Keeping meetings focused and structured.

Training sessions may also benefit from:

- Accessible materials.

Multiple ways of presenting information.

Opportunities to ask questions.

Practical demonstrations.

Performance Management

Managers should ensure performance discussions distinguish between genuine performance concerns and barriers created by the workplace.

Before concluding that performance is poor, consider:

- Have appropriate adjustments been explored?

Are expectations clear?

Has communication been accessible?

Has sufficient support been provided?

Supportive performance management focuses on removing barriers rather than assigning blame.

Access to Work

The UK Government's Access to Work scheme can provide practical support for eligible employees.

Support may include:

- Specialist equipment.

Workplace coaching.

Mental health support.

Communication support.

Travel assistance where appropriate.

Access to Work can be a valuable resource for both employees and employers.

Reviewing Adjustments

Needs may change over time.

Adjustments should be reviewed regularly by asking:

- Is this adjustment still helpful?

Have workplace demands changed?

Would anything improve your working experience further?

Regular reviews encourage ongoing collaboration rather than assuming one solution will remain effective indefinitely.

The Benefits of Reasonable Adjustments

When appropriate adjustments are in place, organisations often experience:

- Improved employee wellbeing.

Increased productivity.

Higher staff retention.

Reduced sickness absence.

Greater confidence.

Better communication.

Improved morale.

Increased innovation.

Stronger workplace inclusion.

Adjustments are investments in people rather than additional burdens.

Common Misconceptions

Myth: Adjustments are expensive.

Reality: Many adjustments cost little or nothing.

Myth: Adjustments give unfair advantages.

Reality: Adjustments remove barriers so employees have equal opportunities to succeed.

Myth: One adjustment works for everyone.

Reality: Effective adjustments are personalised.

Myth: Adjustments reduce performance expectations.

Reality: They help employees meet expectations more effectively.

Key Takeaways

Reasonable adjustments reduce workplace barriers rather than changing the individual.

Every neurodivergent employee has different strengths, preferences and support needs.

Clear communication, flexibility and assistive technology often improve productivity for everyone.

Employers have legal responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 to consider reasonable adjustments where appropriate.

Access to Work can provide additional workplace support.

Regularly reviewing adjustments ensures they remain effective.

Inclusive workplaces focus on removing barriers so employees can perform at their best.

Final Thoughts

Reasonable adjustments are one of the most practical ways organisations can demonstrate their commitment to inclusion. Rather than asking neurodivergent employees to adapt to environments that may not meet their needs, adjustments recognise that workplaces also have a responsibility to reduce unnecessary barriers.

The most effective adjustments are developed through collaboration, respect and open communication. They are tailored to the individual, reviewed regularly and focused on enabling people to use their strengths rather than simply managing their challenges.

Ultimately, reasonable adjustments are not about creating exceptions—they are about creating opportunities. When employees are given the right support, they are more likely to thrive, contribute fully and remain engaged in meaningful work. In doing so, organisations benefit from greater innovation, stronger employee wellbeing and a workplace culture where diversity of thought is recognised as a genuine strength rather than a problem to overcome.