

Neurodivergence and Working Life

Understanding how neurodivergence can influence everyday work, and what meaningful support can look like.

Neurodivergence can influence many aspects of working life, including concentration, communication, sensory processing, organisation, time management, memory and emotional regulation. These differences do not affect everyone in the same way. They can also change depending on the task, the environment, health, fatigue and the support available.

There is no single neurodivergent experience

Neurodivergence is an umbrella term often used in relation to autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, Tourette syndrome and other neurological differences. A person may have more than one neurodivergent condition. Two people with the same diagnosis may experience entirely different strengths, needs and barriers at work.

Rather than assuming what someone can or cannot do, it is more helpful to ask what helps them work effectively, comfortably and sustainably.

Concentration and attention

Open-plan offices, interruptions and competing priorities can make it difficult to sustain attention. Some people find it easier to concentrate when tasks are interesting or highly structured; switching between tasks may still be exhausting. Helpful changes can include protected focus time, quieter workspaces, clear priorities and planned breaks.

Communication and processing

Spoken instructions, indirect language, fast meetings and unexpected questions can create additional processing demands. A person may understand the information but need longer to respond or prefer to communicate in writing. Written summaries, agendas in advance, direct language and agreed communication methods can reduce misunderstandings.

Sensory processing

Lighting, noise, smells, textures, temperature and movement can affect comfort, concentration and wellbeing. Sensory needs are individual: one person may need less stimulation while another benefits from movement or specific sensory input. Adjusting lighting, allowing headphones, offering seating choices or providing access to a quieter space may help.

Organisation, memory and time management

Keeping track of deadlines, remembering verbal instructions, estimating task duration and starting or sequencing work can require significant effort. This is not a measure of motivation or intelligence. Shared calendars, written task lists, step-by-step instructions, visual schedules and regular check-ins can make

expectations clearer.

Emotional regulation and energy

Masking differences, managing sensory discomfort and constantly adapting to a workplace can be tiring. Stress may increase when expectations are unclear, demands are unpredictable or someone feels unable to ask for support. Reliable breaks, manageable workloads, predictable routines and supportive communication can reduce the pressure.

Strengths matter too

Neurodivergent employees may bring valuable perspectives, creativity, specialist knowledge, attention to detail, pattern recognition or novel approaches to problem-solving. These are possibilities, not traits that every neurodivergent person must demonstrate. Strengths are more likely to flourish when unnecessary barriers are removed.

Practical reasonable adjustments

Useful adjustments are personal, proportionate and developed in discussion with the employee. They might include flexible hours, a quieter desk, advance notice of changes, assistive technology, written instructions, modified meeting formats, clear task ownership or a structured approach to feedback.

In the UK, employers have a legal duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled workers where relevant requirements are met under the Equality Act 2010. Whether a particular adjustment is reasonable depends on the circumstances. An employee does not have to compare their difficulties with those of colleagues to explain their own needs.

How to start a supportive conversation

A useful starting point is: *"Which parts of your work are going well, which parts are harder than they need to be, and what changes could help?"* Agree on a small number of adjustments, record what has been agreed and review their usefulness together. Avoid making assumptions from a diagnosis alone.

For employees

You can describe the barriers you face in practical terms: the situation, what happens, the impact on your work and what would help. You do not need to disclose every detail of your medical history to begin discussing adjustments. You may wish to ask for notes of meetings or bring a supporter where appropriate.

For employers and colleagues

Listen without minimising or comparing experiences. Keep conversations confidential, focus on work-related barriers and ask before offering solutions. Clarity, predictability and respectful flexibility often benefit wider teams as well as neurodivergent colleagues.

Further support

Space to Breathe Therapy offers support and resources exploring neurodivergence, mental wellbeing and disability in the workplace. Visit **spacetobreathetherapy.co.uk** to find out more about the Support Hub and available support.

This article provides general information, not an individual legal, medical or occupational-health assessment.