



FACTS

"Support needs are individual."

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Support Needs Are Individual

Understanding neurodiversity and person-centred support in the workplace

Two employees with the same neurodevelopmental condition may have very different experiences, strengths and workplace needs. A diagnostic label can be helpful context, but it cannot tell an employer everything about how a particular person works, what they find difficult or what will help.

Why individual differences matter

Neurodivergent people are not a single, uniform group. Autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia and other neurodevelopmental differences may influence attention, communication, planning, sensory processing, memory and fatigue in varied ways. People may also have overlapping conditions, fluctuating capacity or needs that change with their environment and responsibilities.

For example, one autistic employee might prefer precise written instructions and limited interruptions, while another may prefer a short conversation followed by a written summary. Neither approach is inherently better: the useful question is what works for that person.

A person-centred starting point

Effective workplace support begins with a respectful conversation about particular tasks, barriers and preferences, rather than assumptions drawn from someone else with the same diagnosis.

Recognising needs without making assumptions

Areas that may vary between employees

- Communication: preference for written, spoken or visual information; extra processing time; direct and unambiguous instructions.
- Sensory environment: sound, light, temperature, smells, busy shared spaces or frequent interruptions.
- Organisation and time: prioritising, task initiation, transitions, managing deadlines or keeping track of multiple requests.
- Memory and processing: retaining verbal instructions, switching tasks or processing information under pressure.
- Energy and regulation: social fatigue, stress responses, overwhelm, shutdown or recovery time after demanding work.
- Strengths and interests: individual expertise, creativity, attention to detail, problem-solving and specialist knowledge.

What useful reasonable adjustments can look like

- Providing written summaries, checklists or clear examples alongside verbal instructions.
- Agreeing priorities, realistic deadlines and one consistent route for new tasks.
- Allowing quieter workspaces, headphones or lighting adjustments where appropriate.
- Making meetings more accessible through agendas, breaks and follow-up notes.
- Offering predictable check-ins, flexibility in how work is completed and agreed communication boundaries.
- Reviewing adjustments when job duties, health or working conditions change.

These are examples, not a standard package. An adjustment that supports one employee may be unhelpful or even increase difficulty for another.

Keep support private and collaborative

Employees should not have to defend their needs by comparing themselves with colleagues. Discuss access needs confidentially and share information only where necessary and appropriate. Ask what helps, listen to the response, trial adjustments together and record what has been agreed.

Putting individual support into practice

A practical conversation guide

- 1. Identify the task: Which part of the working day is difficult or draining?
- 2. Explore the barrier: Is it the environment, communication, timing, workload, uncertainty or another factor?
- 3. Ask about preference: What has helped before, and what should be avoided?
- 4. Agree a manageable change: Be clear about the adjustment, who will arrange it and when it starts.
- 5. Review the outcome: Check whether the change is actually helping and adapt it if needed.

Questions employers can ask

- “Which parts of your role work well for you?”
- “Are there any situations that make your work unnecessarily difficult?”
- “How would you prefer instructions, changes or feedback to be communicated?”
- “Would a particular adjustment help, and how shall we review it?”

A note about rights and responsibilities

In the UK, the Equality Act 2010 can require employers to make reasonable adjustments for disabled employees and applicants where legal conditions are met. Not every neurodivergent person has the same legal circumstances, and the appropriate adjustments depend on the individual and workplace context. An occupational health assessment or Access to Work support may help, but does not replace an employer’s own responsibilities.

For employees

You do not need to copy another person’s coping strategies or explain your experiences in exactly the same way. It is reasonable to describe the specific barrier you encounter and the change that would make the task more accessible. You can ask for agreements in writing and request a review if your needs change.

Key message

Same diagnosis does not mean same experience. Inclusive workplaces listen to the individual, respect differences, and make support practical rather than comparative.

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