



PAM Wellness



Neurodivergence at work

Workplace Tool Kit

Author: Nina Parson, CPsychol

Contributors:

Tracey Styan, Workplace Strategy Coach

Rebecca Wones, CPsychol

pamwellness.co.uk



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Foreword

This tool kit has been produced to provide insight in to some of the most common neurodevelopmental conditions and some typical characteristics which are associated with specific conditions.

Of course, everyone is different, and some individuals may identify with some, or all the traits highlighted or possibly none. Some may be very aware of the support available and what they need, others may be unaware and therefore will struggle to advocate their needs. It is important to understand that a person may present with other conditions and health challenges which all lead to a unique set of experiences. Understanding, awareness and support are key.

This tool kit highlights some of the challenges which can occur at work and the type of support which could be implemented to enable your neurodivergent colleague to thrive in their role.

For further advice and support contact PAM Wellness:

[PAM Wellness - Workplace Wellbeing & Neurodiversity Solutions.](#)

Terminology

The language used to describe neurodiversity is evolving. We have endeavoured to use the most up-to-date terminology. Using the right words ensures people are respected and demonstrates a recognition of a movement away from medicalised terminology such as 'disorder' and 'suffer' to more inclusive language. This tool kit mainly uses identity first language. A glossary of terms is provided at the end of this tool kit.





Introduction to Neurodiversity

'Neurodiversity may be every bit as crucial for the human race as biodiversity is for life in general. Who can say what form of wiring will prove best at any given moment?'

Harvey Blume, Journalist, The Atlantic, 1998



The concept of Neurodiversity originally arose from the autistic community and the phrase was coined by Sociologist Judy Singer¹ in her research thesis, with the term first appearing in print in an article by her contemporary, journalist, Harvey Blume². The concept relates to neurological diversity and suggests **neurodevelopmental** conditions such as autism, ADHD, and dyslexia, are the result of normal, natural variations which have been present through human history. Proposing a move away from the medical model of disablement to the social model, which does not see neurodiversity as requiring a 'cure'. Highlighting it is society that disables individuals and suggests it should be recognised as a social category in line with gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity and disability.

Neurodiversity is not just about recognising and accepting individual differences, but also about promoting societal inclusion and accommodating the needs of **neurodivergent** people in all areas of life.

In recent years, the neurodiversity movement has been instrumental in pushing disability up the agenda and into conversations. There are many neurodivergent individuals who speak eloquently about their condition, self-advocate and bring awareness to their lived experience.

Some talk about having a 'superpower' although for many this type of rhetoric detracts from the fact that neurodivergent individuals can experience immense challenges in aspects of day-to-day life, relationships, and work. Specific needs and the levels of support can differ over the space of a day or over the years. The level of disability a person feels or becomes, is often related to the context of their experience.

Aspects of a job role can present a greater degree of challenge for a neurodivergent person, which in turn impacts performance. This guide provides awareness and suggestions of how to support neurodivergent colleagues to overcome barriers to enable equitable ways of working.

This tool kit has been developed to support neurodivergent colleagues and provide insight into specific neurodevelopmental conditions: Autism, ADHD, Dyslexia, DCD/Dyspraxia and Dyscalculia to understand the challenges faced by these **neurominorities** but to also recognise their strengths. Guidance is provided on ways you can support your neurodivergent colleague or team member and pathways to securing additional support if required.

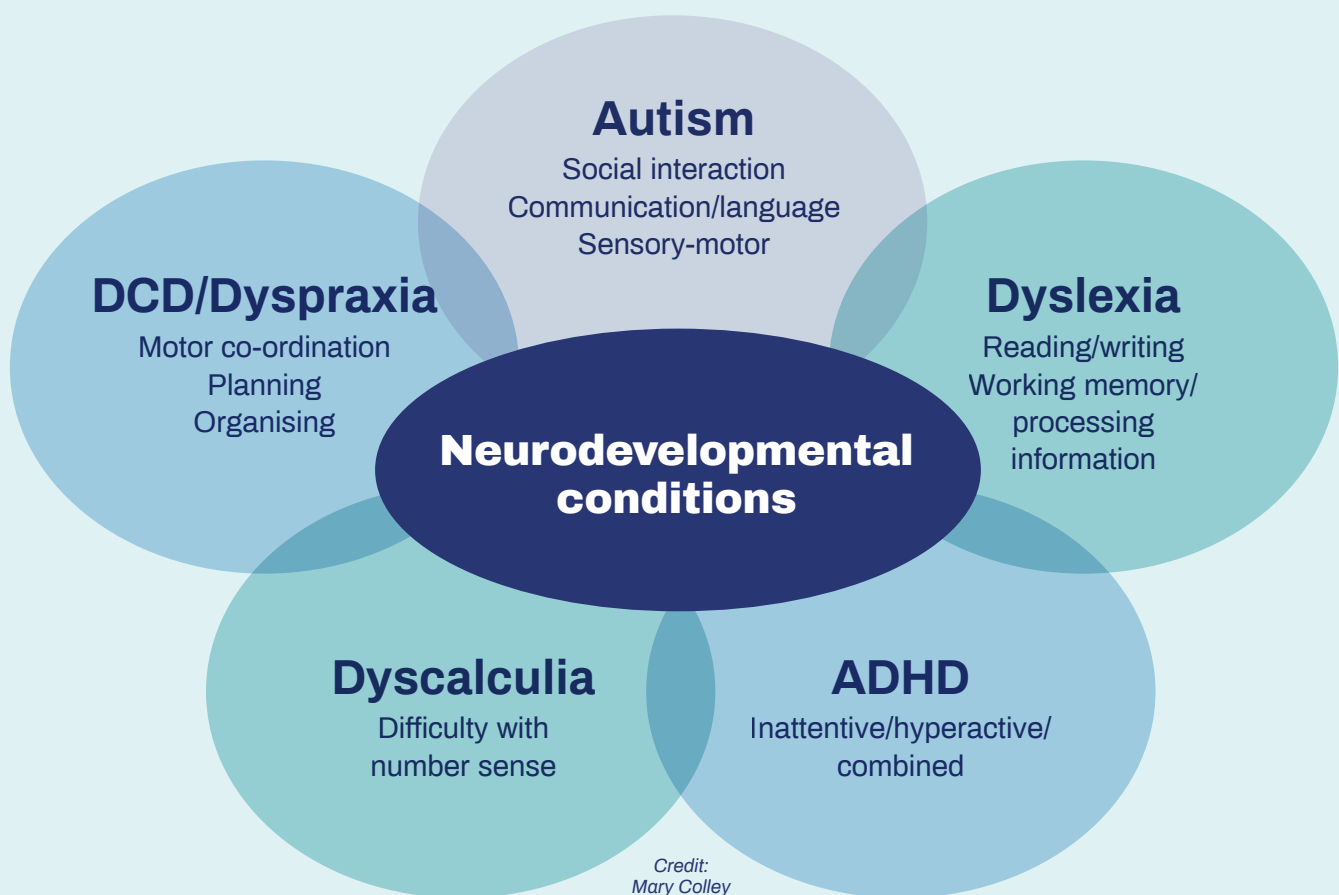


Understanding Neurodiversity

Co-occurrence

Approximately 15-20% of the population are considered to have a neurodevelopmental condition.

It is not unusual to find a co-occurrence of these conditions alongside mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, and OCD (obsessive compulsive disorder).



Co-occurrence of neurodevelopmental conditions is common - approximately 28%-44% of adults diagnosed with autism also meet the criteria for ADHD³. Research cited by Brimo et al⁴ highlighted between 25% and 40% of individuals with ADHD have dyslexia.

Co-occurrence with mental health conditions is also common, although due to varying methods of assessment there is currently no conclusive evidence. But estimates from a meta-analysis of research estimated current and lifetime prevalence for adults with autism were between 27% and 42%

for any anxiety disorder, social anxiety 29% and 20%, and 23% and 37% for depressive disorders⁵.

Other studies have highlighted the prevalence of depressive disorders in ADHD subjects was 8.6% to 55% compared to non-ADHD subjects. Anxiety was also shown to be high in the ADHD population compared to the non-ADHD population with a prevalence rate of 4.3%-47.1%⁶.

Neurodivergent people all have individual experiences and the impact of their condition, or the combination of conditions is uniquely formed. Genetics, gender, education, health, environment, socio-economic background all play a part.



They will have experienced persistent challenges through their lives, some more extreme than others. Some individuals may have developed good strategies to support their day-to-day tasks and functions or chosen a job which plays to their strengths and report no challenges. Other neurodivergent individuals may find themselves in situations or roles at work which expose some of their underlying neurodivergent characteristics which cause challenges with some aspects of their role at work.

Intersectionality - recognises the differences which exist within neurodivergent populations. People of all gender orientations, ethnicities, cultures, religion, class, and economic backgrounds can be diagnosed with a neurodevelopmental condition. However, their multiple identities, belonging to marginalised or minority groups, they will have unique experiences which need to be acknowledged. For example, women, LGBTQIA+ or people of colour, can have a greater risk of a delayed diagnosis. Research has shown there are often differences in rates of diagnosis, with context and strong cultural factors at play which may bias the interpretation of certain behaviours, as found in the National Autistic Society Diverse Perspectives Report⁷.

Added to this, the wide variation in economic wealth – the ability to pay for a private diagnosis or potentially wait years for a diagnosis through the NHS result in large sections of society being unable to confidently self-advocate. Other factors which can have an impact on neurodivergent individuals include mental health, trauma, and hormonal changes such as during the perimenopause which can ‘unmask’ underlying neurodivergent conditions.

Executive Functions

An area where there are often observed differences between **neurotypical** and neurodivergent individuals at work is with executive functioning. This refers to a part of the brain involved in cognitive control. Executive functions enable a person to manage everyday tasks such

as planning, organising, prioritising, self-monitoring, problem solving, and adapting to new situations. The ability to manage emotions and impulse control, such as thinking before acting, and the ability to flex thinking - such as multitasking and adjusting to unexpected situations.

Being able to use memory strategies is one aspect of executive functioning, in particular **Working memory**. This is the ability to retain information, hold on to the information, make sense of it and recall it. For example, remembering a list of tasks to complete in a particular order, remembering a phone number, or recalling accurately information from a passage of text you have just read. Working memory is key for learning, reasoning, and comprehension. We often find neurodivergent people have challenges with their working memory which may not always be as efficient as neurotypical people.

These skills are used every day but for neurodivergent individuals they often experience challenges with aspects of executive functioning such as:

- Difficulty with planning and organising
- Learning new information
- Anticipating consequences
- Concentration and focus
- Task initiation
- Losing possessions
- Being forgetful
- Time management
- Understanding or overestimating the length of time to complete a task
- Controlling emotions
- Acting or saying something without thinking
- Rigid thinking

Self-Advocacy - Access to adjustments is still highly variable, with the onus usually on the neurodivergent employee to identify and advocate for adjustments.



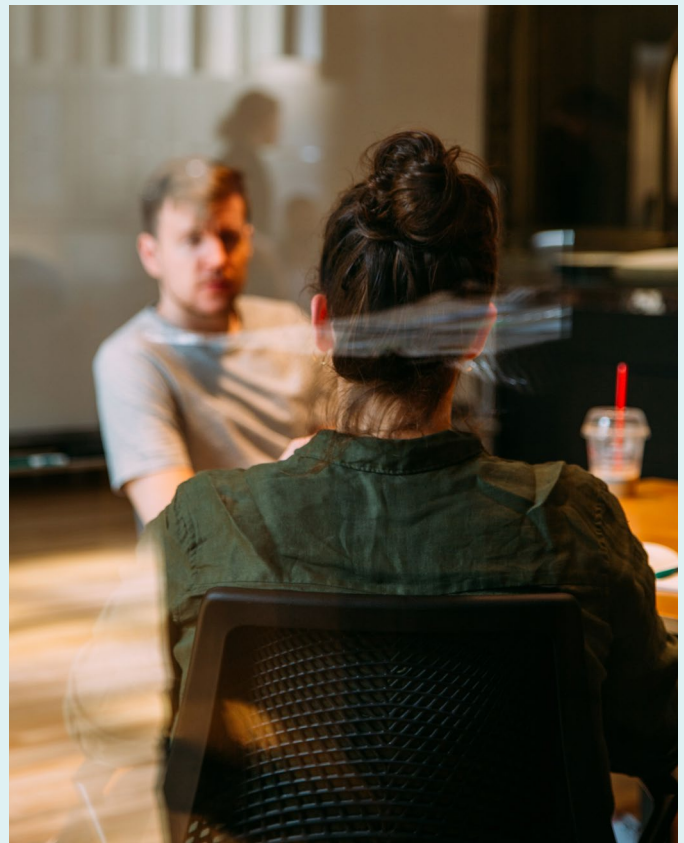
Disclosure and Confidentiality

Often at work people have a dilemma as to whether to disclose or not to disclose their neurodivergence. They may not have experienced challenges initially at work, but a change in role or daily tasks may start to impact on performance and unmask some of the traits they had previously been able to manage. Disclosing is not always easy, and of course it should be an individual's choice as it is very personal to them.

There is no legal requirement for a person to share their neurodivergent condition with their employer. There are many reasons why a person may choose not to such as:

- Negative past experiences
- Embarrassed
- Fear of how others will treat them
- Considered dishonest for not mentioning it sooner
- Not wanting to make a fuss
- Negative consequences
 - *Feeling marginalised*
 - *Not promoted*
 - *Ostracised by team*
- Lack of trust in HR, manager, or colleagues

If a person decides to share, this is personal information and should be treated as confidential. Their condition should not be openly discussed or shared with team members unless your neurodivergent colleague has expressly stated they are happy to share this information with them. This can be helpful, as the team will understand why adjustments such as a flexible start time, have been put in place. All documents about your colleague's neurodivergence should be kept secure. It is important to respect your colleague's privacy.



Thriving in a Neurotypical World

The work environment typically has not been designed with neurodiversity in mind. If a person does not feel they are working in an inclusive environment or are understood they may be less likely to share and may **'mask'** specific traits to present themselves as neurotypical. Which can result in frustrations and burnout and possibly extended sick leave.

Neurodivergent colleagues will be more likely to be open if they feel their organisation has created a culture of inclusion, demonstrated how they are supportive and provided options so a person can choose who they disclose to.

By working collaboratively and implementing some of the tips and strategies from this tool kit, alongside reaching out for additional support available through specialists such as workplace assessors, counsellors and coaches; neurodivergent colleagues can gain confidence and demonstrate their true abilities.



Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a condition that affects people's behaviour. People with ADHD can seem restless, may have trouble concentrating and may act on impulse⁸.

The key characteristics of ADHD according to the **DSM-5** criteria include Inattention, Hyperactivity, and Impulsivity.

There are three ADHD subtypes which people can be diagnosed with:

- **ADHD – Predominately Inattentive type** – applied if a person has attentional difficulties.
- **ADHD – Predominately Hyperactivity/ Impulsivity type** – applied if a person is excessively restless and impulsive.
- **ADHD – Combined type** – applied when both Inattentive and Hyperactivity/ Impulsivity are present.

UK estimates vary, but the prevalence of ADHD in the adult population is approximately 3-4%, with a male to female ratio of 3:1⁹.

Impact at work

The following are some examples of the impact ADHD can have on work tasks:

- **Difficulty sustaining attention** – in meetings or when carrying out tasks which are mundane or less interesting, or when reading large volumes of documents.
- **Easily distracted** – this may be apparent when working in an open plan office, such as being easily distracted by certain sounds including conversations, other sensory challenges, instant messages or not appearing to be listening when being spoken to.
- **Poor attention to detail** – work produced may not be at a level of detail expected or may be overly detailed in an area which was of interest but neglecting other aspects of the task. They may not have noticed mistakes in their work.
- **Difficulty organising tasks** - may miss deadlines, misjudge the time it will take to complete a task/project, forget to carry out a task or misplace items.



- **Task initiation** – may procrastinate over tasks which appear too cumbersome, mundane, or overwhelming. May start a task and switch to another task before completing the first. Dislikes sustained mental effort.
- **Following instructions** – particularly if given verbally, may forget aspects of the task or complete tasks in the incorrect order.
- **Restless** – difficulty staying seated, fidgets, moving around a lot, talking excessively. Difficulty waiting to take their turn, for example when waiting in a queue.
- **Impulsivity** – difficulty waiting for their turn to speak, will interrupt, talk over someone, blurt out an answer before the question is completed.
- **Poor time management** – can include being late to work, missing deadlines or late to meetings.

Strengths

Examples of strengths ADHDeers can bring to work:

- **Creativity and out-of-the-box thinking** – provide a different perspective or solution to a task or problem.
- **Hyperfocus and Productivity** – being interested or engaged in a task they enjoy can lead to hyperfocus for long periods of time or completing a task in a short amount of time.
- **High energy and enthusiasm** – social skills, energy and enthusiasm can be infectious amongst their team which can bring a positive motivational element to tasks or projects in which they are engaged.
- **Adaptability and flexibility** - able to pivot and refocus if priorities suddenly change.

Strategies to support at work

Everyone with ADHD is different and the challenges they face are unique to them. If you are a manager of a colleague with ADHD, when discussing challenges with performance, the most productive strategy is to take a collaborative, non-judgemental approach. Frame your conversation in a way to focus on finding strategies to support your colleague in their role. Consider the strengths your colleague brings to work and discuss ways they can utilise their strengths within aspects of their role.

Learn about ADHD

Increase your understanding of ADHD by reading about the condition, invite colleagues with lived experience to share their personal stories, if they are comfortable to do so, or attend an Awareness Session to learn more about ADHD.

Managers can support by:

- **Actively listen** – take time to listen to your colleague's challenges, ask them what has worked for them in the past, in similar roles or at school/college/university.
- **Strengths based approach** – consider how their strengths can be utilised in their role and their way of working.
- **Reviewing the structure of the day** - consider the feasibility of adapting working practices such as flexible start and finish times, working in chunks of time followed by a 5–10-minute break.
- **Management of workload** - set clear parameters and timelines for completion of work. Including mini deadlines with regular reviews to ensure your colleague is remaining on track. Early detection of potentially falling behind will enable you or your colleague taking action to address this in a collaborative way.

- **In-built technology** – utilise calendars and task management systems, colour code calendar entries and set reminders to support time management.
- **Avoid distraction** – noise cancelling headphones block noise and help maintain focus in an open plan office. If possible, sit at a desk away from distractions. The ability to work from home, if operationally feasible, may be a solution to avoid distraction, particularly if working on cognitively demanding tasks.

Colleague Support:

- **Meetings** – allow note taking or use of transcription software to record meetings so all your colleagues can review the content. Check beforehand that everyone is comfortable with recording and ensure confidentiality.
- **Clear communication** – written instructions and bullet points to summarise are helpful to ensure all relevant information is captured and shared accurately alongside any verbal discussions.
- **Software** – for team projects or assignments utilise project management software which is visual and easy to monitor progress with assigned tasks and completion against key metrics.
- **Communication etiquette** - consider the impact of an 'always on' culture. Your colleague with ADHD may turn off notifications for some of the day to avoid distraction. Consider management of expectations, such as when it would be reasonable to expect a reply.

Support available for colleagues with ADHD

What works for you? – Not everyone who has ADHD or suspects they have ADHD knows all the answers. You may be on a personal journey of discovery and still figuring out what ways of working are best for the tasks you do. Think about what strategies or technology you might find helpful; did you have support in education or in a previous role? Note these down and share with HR, your manager or colleagues and they can work with you to ensure the right adaptations are in place. These can also be added to a **Work Adjustments Passport**.

Join a neuroinclusion or disability network - you are very unlikely to be alone and being part of a community means you can learn, support each other, and share knowledge. Explore internally to see if your company has such a network or otherwise investigate external networks which could be associated with your profession or community.

Assistive Technology – specialist software which is designed to support neurodivergent employees with everything from recognising and reading text in multiple formats, mind mapping software to aid planning and organising, predictive text to avoid spelling and grammar errors, to making suggestions to improve sentence structure.

Personal wellbeing and strengths – good sleep hygiene, regular exercise and a well-balanced diet are additional ways to ensure you maintain overall health and wellbeing. Set boundaries and avoid taking on too much. Remember the strengths you bring to your role. Be sure to break tasks in to chunks so they are more manageable.



Autism

Autism is a life-long developmental condition affecting social and communication skills and the way in which people experience the world around them, sensory processing and patterns of behaviour or interests.

Autism is known as a ‘spectrum’ condition because there is wide variation in the type and severity of challenges people experience. This should not be thought of as linear but as differences within the individual, they may have some aspects which require high levels of additional support and other areas which require little to no support.

Autistica¹⁰ estimates that around 1-2% of the UK population is autistic.

The 2024 Buckland Review of Autism Employment¹¹, highlighted around one third of autistic employees felt unable to discuss their adjustment needs at all, and of those who did request adjustments, over a quarter were refused and more than 1 in 10 found the adjustment was poorly implemented.

Key Characteristics of Autism and Impact at Work

The following areas identify autistic traits and how the autistic experience differs from neurotypical experiences:

Sensory Processing – autists can have heightened sensitivities to certain environmental stimuli such as light, temperature, touch, smell, sound, or textures. Causing anxiety and feeling stressed or overwhelmed by the experience. Conversely, they can experience reduced sensitivity to certain stimuli.

These experiences are very individual, but it is important to understand the effect sensory sensitivities can have on the ability to perform in their role. Seek to provide accommodations or adjustments to the work environment or to aspects of their role to enable them to thrive at work.

Social Communication and Interaction -

interaction styles can vary widely from non-verbal, to misinterpreting social cues and nuances in facial expressions, body language or verbal communication. Some autistic individuals may have highly advanced language skills and written communication skills but struggle with ‘small talk’ or subtleties in language such as idioms or sarcasm.

Other differences include:

- Challenges with maintaining eye contact
- May interpret what someone tells them literally
- Clear and direct language
- Providing an honest answer to a question, which, dependent on context could be interpreted as insensitive
- May be unaware when they enter a colleague’s personal space
- Strong sense of justice and abiding by the rules
- Preference for monologuing
- May be anxious and not feel confident to speak up
- Misunderstandings can occur between autistic employees and their neurotypical colleagues due to different communication styles, and interpretations of a situation or expectations
- Social interaction at work may bring challenges for both an autistic employee and their neurotypical colleagues. They may come across to colleagues as aloof or abrupt. However, research has shown autistic people can experience emotions intensely, referred to as hyper-empathy. An autistic person may prefer spending time alone at work, with fewer social interactions and may not wish to attend specific events which could be anxiety provoking. However, it is still important to ask them.



Repetitive and Restricted Behaviours

- Preference for routine, an autistic colleague may become anxious if there are changes which can disrupt their routine.
- Challenges with flexible thinking and adapting to new contexts or situations.
- Carry out repetitive movements when stressed or excited known as stimming such as twirling hair, clicking a pen, pacing, or rocking – **stimming** can present in a range of ways.
- Having control over their environment such as the placement of objects, tools, or items on their desk.
- Set route to work, set time to take lunch or breaks during the day.

Circumscribed Interests

- Intense interest in a specific subjects or hobbies which are very enjoyable for your autistic colleague.
- Can hyper-focus for hours at a time on their interest and forget to take a break or eat.
- Deep knowledge on a specific area of interest and may be considered a specialist or subject matter expert in a work context.

Challenges with co-ordination

- May be considered 'clumsy'.
- May find it difficult to maintain their posture such as when standing for long periods of time.
- May have challenges with fine motor skills such as tying shoelaces, or gross motor skills such as putting on clothes.
- May not be aware of excessive force they are using such as when closing a door or sitting down heavily in their chair.

Autistic Masking

It can be difficult to identify autism, some autistic adults go to great lengths to appear 'normal' in front of colleagues or in other environments to hide social discomfort. There are times in everyone's lives where they may choose to present a different persona depending on the situation. However autistic **masking** involves great levels of energy as they suppress their true selves. For example, maintaining eye contact at work, suppressing **stimming** behaviour, engaging in social chit-chat, having a list of go-to phrases or facial expressions which they need to remember to use in certain situations such as smiling when a colleague engages in conversation.

Autistic masking is a self-protection mechanism to show a version of themselves which will be socially acceptable to neurotypical people. However, masking is not sustainable and can impact performance at work, exhaustion, **shutdowns**, **meltdowns**, and **burnout**. Over time continuous masking can impact self-esteem and potentially development of a mental health condition such as anxiety or depression.

Female Autism

Historically males have been diagnosed with autism in greater numbers than females. This is mainly due to the diagnostic criteria focusing on traits which have usually been ascribed as male traits.

Female intense interests often fall in to socially and culturally acceptable interests such as (but not limited to) fashion, make up, pets, sport, cooking.

Women tend to be quieter and less likely to draw attention to themselves and therefore not seen as 'problematic'.

Many women have spent a lifetime of mirroring behaviours from primary school onwards, mixing with a social group of trusted friends which have likely shielded them from difficult social situations. As they have moved into adulthood, they have created strategies and further ways of controlling their environment, possibly even their choice of job role, to enable them to continue to mask their autism.



Energy management

Over time masking can have consequences. Feeling 'different', not quite fitting into social groups, feeling isolated, daily exhaustion from masking at work each day, coupled with life stressors, and hormonal changes due to the menopause all take their toll. Mental health is affected. Autistic experiences of the world around them can lead to **shutdown**, **meltdown** or **burnout**. It may be unsurprising to hear that many women receive a late diagnosis of autism.

Strengths:

- **Problem solving** – Research has found autistic individuals were 40% faster at problem solving than non-autistic individuals¹².
- **Pattern Recognition** - Research has shown autistic brains are faster at recognising patterns. A study by Soulieres¹² in 2009 found autistic individuals tended to use visual strategies therefore aiding the speed of pattern recognition.
- **Expertise in specific area of interest** – due to an intensive interest in a specific topic, to the extent that they can be seen as experts in their field with excellent detailed specific knowledge.
- **Hyper-focus** – able to remain intensely focused on a task or piece of research for extended periods of time.
- **Long term memory** – autistic individuals often have excellent long-term memory and can accurately recall specific details.
- **Rational decision making** – less likely to make irrational decisions based on instinct, instead they will tend to make decisions based on evidence such as consistency in a pattern of outcomes and attention to detail.
- **Lateral thinking** – their ability to 'think outside the box' means they can produce novel and unusual ideas and solutions.

Strategies to support at work:

Autistic experiences are unique and there are many interconnecting factors which can influence an individual's experience at work. It is important to take a supportive or collaborative approach when addressing areas of challenge and seek to collaborate to understand how to support them further to develop strategies and work independently.

Learn about Autism

Increase your awareness and understanding of autism by reading about the condition, invite colleagues with lived experience from your organisation to share their personal stories if they are comfortable to do so, or attend an Awareness Session to learn more about autism.

Managers can support by:

- Using clear unambiguous language and avoiding acronyms.
- Recognise and refer to the strengths your autistic colleague brings. This not only boosts self-esteem and confidence but provides your colleague with a benchmark of what 'good' looks like.
- Consider adaptations to reduce or eliminate triggers for sensory sensitivity – work clothing, smells, bright lights, crowded environments.
- Consider the working environment – where would your colleague work at their best - flexible / hybrid/ working from home?
- Organising a quiet space to work in the office with the option of a fixed desk.
- Supplying noise cancelling headphones.
- Communicating in advance with as much notice as possible if there will be changes to fixed routines or structure. Explain why the change is necessary and work collaboratively with your employee to ensure they feel less anxious.



- Buddy to support your colleague day to day in the office.
- Allow your colleague time to process information and adapt your style of communication, for example in writing rather than verbally. This would put less demand on their **executive functioning** and enable them to concentrate and respond with greater levels of detail and clarity.
- Summarise key messages or meeting notes preferably using bullet points.
- Ensure you maintain regular one-to-one meetings.

Colleague Support:

- Ensure communication is clear and unambiguous.
- Awareness that your colleague may find social/team gatherings overwhelming and may prefer not to attend. But still give them the option to attend.
- Agree clear directives, parameters, plan, and timelines to support project work or team collaboration.

Support available for Autistic colleagues

- Consider the environment where you work at your best.
- List incidents and situations which can be triggering and work with your manager/buddy/coach to devise strategies to manage similar situations.
- If you need to communicate your concerns, consider writing rather than speaking to HR or your manager to give you time to refine your message.
- Employee support group – find out if your company has an employee neurodiversity or disability network. This is a good opportunity to connect with colleagues and share experiences. Alternatively, there are several autistic support groups online.

Counselling – if you have struggles with mental health, such as anxiety, depression, identity, or other challenges. Talking therapies can provide support. They can be accessed through the NHS, privately or through your occupational health provider.

Assistive Technology – specialist software which is designed to support neurodivergent employees. Technology that autistic employees have found helpful include mind mapping software to aid planning and organising, and apps that support with managing anxiety and overwhelm.

Work based strategy coaching - working with a coach who specialises in supporting autistic individuals can be helpful to support you with developing strategies which can be applied to managing and carrying out tasks, interactions, and ways of working, develop self-advocacy skills and a sense of independence.

Personal wellbeing and strengths – be aware of your triggers and seek to minimise situations and environments which you know can cause overwhelm, stress and anxiety. Think about your energy levels. Make sure you take time to rest and be yourself. Good sleep hygiene, regular exercise and a well-balanced diet are additional ways to ensure you maintain overall personal wellbeing.



Dyslexia

'Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty which primarily affects reading and writing skills. However, it does not only affect these skills. Dyslexia is actually about information processing. Dyslexic people may have difficulty processing and remembering information they see and hear, which can affect learning and the acquisition of literacy skills. Dyslexia can also impact on other areas such as organisational skills.' (British Dyslexia Association, 2024)

Approximately 10% of the UK population have dyslexia¹³ according to the British Dyslexia Association.

Key Characteristics of Dyslexia and Impact at Work

Reading – decoding words when reading - known as **phonological processing**, dyslexics may misread words or re-read text and as a result it will take longer to read. They may avoid reading aloud or public speaking because they are concerned they may mispronounce words or jumble up their words.

Writing - this includes spelling, grammar, structuring their sentences and paragraphs, word choices including selecting the correct spelling of words that sound the same such as 'their' and 'there'. Making mistakes in their writing but not notice them.

Organisation - individuals with dyslexia may struggle with organising their thoughts into actions, finding it challenging to plan and execute tasks in a logical order, or plan and prioritise.

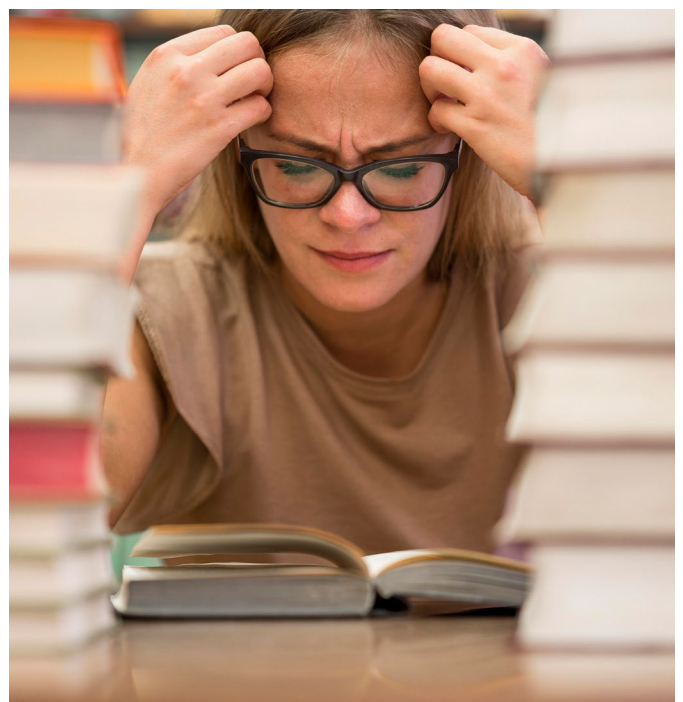
Working Memory – individuals with dyslexia often experience challenges with processing multi-layered information and therefore transferring information to long-term memory, to remember and recall details.

Processing Speed – is an area where dyslexic brains may not be as efficient in reading as quickly or accurately and may take longer to decipher meaning and summarise what they have read.

Sequencing – dyslexic individuals can find it more challenging retaining information in sequence. They may find it difficult to follow verbal instructions or remember the correct sequence of a process to complete tasks efficiently.

Concentration – the effort dyslexic individuals exert when undertaking tasks at work such as reading and writing can be challenging in themselves. However, with additional distractions such as background noise and the pressure of deadlines this can impact their ability to perform as efficiently in their role.

Low confidence – may have low self-esteem and confidence in their capabilities, particularly when comparing themselves to their peers, often built up over a lifetime of negative experiences.





Strengths

Examples of strengths dyslexic individuals can bring to work:

Long Term Memory – dyslexic individuals may have challenges with their short-term **working memory**; however, they often have excellent long-term memory being able to recall details and connect events which happened some time ago.

Creative Thinkers and Problem Solvers – able to come up with innovative ideas, designs, and processes. Thinking differently about a problem, producing unconventional solutions.

Verbal communication – although dyslexic individuals may struggle with written communication, they often excel at verbal communication. Providing an option so they can explain their knowledge and expertise verbally is likely to be beneficial.

Visual capabilities - with good spatial awareness and seeing interconnectedness of shapes, they can be adept at 'seeing' how flat pack furniture fits together or 'seeing' a design on paper in 3D.

Good people skills/personable – able to be empathetic and have an intuitive understanding of other people.

Practical - often good at practical tasks and roles that have a high level of practicality – facilities maintenance, engineering, design.

Seeing the 'big picture' – able to see relationships in data which may be otherwise overlooked. Including the ability to make connections and spot patterns between seemingly unrelated details, such as when analysing data providing insights or managing a project.

Strategies to support at work

Dyslexia is predominantly associated with reading and writing tasks at work, but it is acknowledged dyslexia impacts other aspects such as planning and organising work. Some people have developed strategies over the years to support themselves,

but many are still seeking the best ways of working and may not be aware of different types of support available or strategies which can help.

Learn about Dyslexia

Increased awareness and understanding of dyslexia by reading about the condition, invite colleagues with lived experience from your organisation to share their personal stories if they are comfortable to do so, or attend an Awareness Session to learn more about dyslexia.

Managers can support by:

Assistive technology – consider installing specialist software which can support with reading and writing such as speech to text and text to speech. Spelling and grammar software which also highlights homophone errors. Mind mapping tools to provide a pictorial format of a plan. Find out if your organisation has a catalogue of assistive technology which can be accessed from their IT platform.

Support with planning and organising workload – collaborate with your colleague to see how they can utilise inbuilt support such as a digital calendar which can be colour coded, creating a digital task list, using project management software or use a paper notepad or desk diary or sticky notes.

Regular one to ones – to ensure your team member is on track with their work. This is an opportunity to focus on areas they are doing well which will help boost confidence as well as taking time to discuss areas where they may need additional support.

Avoiding distraction – discuss with your colleague what causes them to become distracted and seek to find solutions together. Such as working from a quieter area of the office or working from home if tasks require a lot of concentration. If office-based, noise cancelling headphones can be a great addition. Agree times of the day to answer emails and respond to messages instead of instantly.



Colleague Support:

Support with proofreading – your dyslexic colleague may not always see their mistakes or recognise if a sentence does not make sense to the reader. Being able to receive feedback from a colleague will help boost their confidence and help them to avoid similar errors. Provide a written summary, use a highlighter, or track changes in the document can be helpful.

Communication style – consider the best style of communication, for example, after a meeting send a bullet point summary. Some dyslexics are more confident speaking rather than writing so consider options such as receiving voice notes from them.

Templates – shared templates for creating documents can be helpful for everyone not just your dyslexic colleagues, and likely to reduce errors.

Editable documents – ensure documents are in a format which enables editing. This is helpful to enable a change of font, text size and background colour to make the document dyslexic friendly whilst they are working on it.

Team working – be aware that your dyslexic colleague may need additional time to read a report or write a document. If you are involved in project planning, it would be beneficial to build this into the time frame.

Support available for dyslexic colleagues

Create a crib sheet – of frequently misspelled words or errors you can make such as forgetting an apostrophe or checking homophone spelling errors.

Adjusting font and size – find a font that makes reading and writing easier for you. Some fonts are easier to read than others for example Arial or Calibri or the free to download Dyslexie font. Think about text and spacing of words and lines keep the right-hand margin unjustified as this helps when reading.

Support Network – find out if there is an employee support group for neurodivergent colleagues at work or look for a network outside of work, where dyslexic individuals share personal experiences and tips for everyday support.

Assistive Technology – consider what accessibility software is already built into your work laptop or computer. For example, Apple and Windows have several built-in support solutions including text to voice so you can hear back what you have written or voice to text enabling you to talk and the software types for you thereby minimising errors. Investigate editing software to help with spelling, grammar, and structure.

Personal wellbeing and strengths – At times you may feel disheartened or frustrated that some types of work take longer to complete. Try not to feel disheartened as there is support available. It can be helpful to note what strengths you bring to the role and how you use those strengths to support yourself, your colleagues, or clients. You might find it helpful to discuss with a colleague or your manager.

Dyspraxia/Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD)

Dyspraxia, also known as developmental co-ordination disorder (DCD), is a common disorder that affects movement and co-ordination¹⁴.

Traits start in early childhood and children may miss developmental milestones such as crawling or be a late walker or taking longer to learn to ride a bike or drive.

Studies suggest the prevalence of Dyspraxia in UK children is between 1.8% - 4.9%¹⁵. Dyspraxia continues into adulthood where problems associated with co-ordination persist.

Key characteristics of dyspraxia and impact at work

- **Gross motor coordination** – poor balance, challenges with visual spatial skills, being 'clumsy', bumping into things, less fluid in the way they move.
- **Fine motor coordination** – poor handwriting and pen control, so unable to take notes quickly and legibly, difficulty using intricate tools and equipment, tying shoelaces, doing up buttons.
- **Sequential processing** - carrying out tasks and processes in a specific order, such as cooking, dressing and self-care.
- **Organisation skills** – such as packing a bag for a business trip, lose items or can be forgetful.
- **Planning** - planning and organising their day, thoughts, projects, or written work. Challenges with time management which can lead to missing deadlines.
- **Social interaction and communication** - due to low levels of confidence and self-esteem, this can be an area of challenge.
- **Way finding** – difficulties with orientation, following directions and can be prone to getting lost in unfamiliar surroundings.
- **Learning new tasks and skills** – may take longer and require extra time to practice.
- **Verbal dyspraxia** – sometimes people with DCD/dyspraxia can experience challenges with speech and language. Your colleague may have challenges finding the words, mixing words up or forming the words they want to say. Speech and language therapy can support.





Red Flag - if motor coordination difficulties have recently appeared or they are getting worse, it is important to bring this to the attention of a GP immediately to rule out any other causes.

Strengths

Examples of strengths people with DCD/Dyspraxia can bring to work:

Attention to detail - individuals with dyspraxia often have excellent attention to detail noticing nuances or errors that others may overlook leading to higher quality outputs and accuracy.

Problem-solving skills – often able to think ‘outside the box’. People with dyspraxia often have good problem-solving skills. Produce alternative ways of approaching tasks and finding solutions, offering fresh perspectives and ideas to the team.

Perseverance and resilience – faced with motor coordination challenges, dyspraxics often need to bring a greater level of effort to accomplish certain tasks, cultivating a determined and resilient attitude to overcoming obstacles and achieve their goals, which can inspire and motivate their teammates.

Adaptability and flexibility - dyspraxic individuals are often adept at adapting to different situations and finding workarounds. They may have developed strategies and coping mechanisms to navigate their challenges, making them resourceful and adaptable team members. Their ability to adapt can be particularly valuable in dynamic work environments or when faced with unexpected changes.

Creativity and innovation – dyspraxic individuals often possess creative thinking skills leading to unconventional approaches and ideas. They may excel in fields that require creative problem-solving, such as design, arts, or innovation-driven projects.

Empathy and inclusivity - Individuals with dyspraxia often have a heightened sense of empathy towards others, due to having their own experiences of challenges. They may contribute to fostering a supportive and inclusive team culture.

Strategies to support at work:

It is important for team members and managers to provide appropriate support and accommodations to individuals with dyspraxia to ensure they can fully leverage their strengths and overcome any barriers. By creating an inclusive and understanding work environment, teams can benefit from the valuable contributions that individuals with dyspraxia can bring.

Learn about DCD/Dyspraxia

Increase your awareness and understanding of DCD/Dyspraxia by reading about the condition, invite colleagues with lived experience from your organisation to share their personal stories if they are comfortable to do so, or attend an Awareness Session to learn more about DCD/Dyspraxia.

Managers can support by:

Creating an inclusive environment – consider how to ensure your colleague feels supported, reduce obstacles which could cause a tripping hazard.

Fixed desk – having a fixed desk and familiar route into the same office space can avoid challenges with navigating different spaces.

Ergonomic equipment - a laptop keyboard or a standard size keyboard may be more challenging to accurately type with, consider a keyboard with larger keys.

Assistive technologies – such as voice to text software to minimise the need to type. Planning software which helps with organising work and planning their time effectively.

Extended time to practice – your colleague is likely to benefit for additional time to learn and practice new processes, tasks, or skills. But once mastered should be as capable as their colleagues.



Guidelines - produce clear guidelines for processes and step-by-step instruction for using equipment, such as the photocopier. Ensure practical training is available to support your colleague to build their co-ordination skills through practice.

Colleague Support:

Patience and understanding – recognise it may take your colleague a little longer to learn or take on board a new task or skill.

Support with practice – your colleague may require additional support with practice, being able to offer sometime to support if required is likely to be beneficial and boost their confidence. With additional practice they are likely to excel.

Support available for dyspraxic colleagues

Practice new skills – ensure you ask for additional time to practice new tasks and processes you are required to complete at work.

Support network – find out if there is an employee support group for neurodivergent colleagues at work or look for a network outside of work, where dyspraxic individuals share personal experiences and tips for everyday support.

Develop motor skills – taking part in activities outside of work to support your coordination skills such as dance, crafts, cooking, strength-based exercises, and sports which could help improve coordination, and support a healthy lifestyle.

Occupational Therapy – can help with strategies to support coordination in everyday life skills.

Assistive Technology – consider what accessibility software is already built into your work laptop or computer. Apple and Windows have several in-built support solutions, including text to voice so you can hear back what you have written and voice to text, enabling you to talk and the software types the text for you, thereby minimising errors.

Personal wellbeing and strengths – Try not to be too hard on yourself. You may feel frustrated at times with the limitations you experience related to coordination, but it is important to acknowledge the strengths you bring to the role and how you use those strengths to support yourself, your colleagues, or clients. You might find it helpful to discuss with a colleague or your manager. If you feel your self-esteem and confidence are impacted, consider talking therapies or EAP who can offer support.

Dyscalculia

SASC¹⁶ define Dyscalculia as:

'Dyscalculia is a specific and persistent difficulty in understanding numbers which can lead to a diverse range of difficulties with mathematics. It will be unexpected in relation to age, level of education and experience and occurs across all ages and abilities.'

Mathematics difficulties are best thought of as a continuum, not a distinct category, and they have many causal factors. Dyscalculia falls at one end of the spectrum and will be distinguishable from other mathematics issues due to the severity of difficulties with number sense, including subitising, symbolic and non-symbolic magnitude comparison, and ordering. It can occur singly but often co-occurs with other specific learning difficulties, mathematics anxiety and medical conditions.

Research indicates the prevalence of dyscalculia is approximately 3-6%, found in population studies of children carried out in the United States, England, Germany, Switzerland, and Israel.¹⁷

As with the other neurodivergent conditions mentioned in this toolkit, dyscalculia can co-occur. With an overlap between with dyslexia at 30-40% and ADHD at 10-20%.¹⁸

Research on dyscalculia falls behind other neurodivergent conditions such as dyslexia and many children and adults remain undiagnosed due to less awareness about the condition.

Key characteristics of dyscalculia and impact at work

- **Understanding mathematical concepts and symbols** – this makes it difficult to use numerical terms, understand mathematical rules and functions such as addition, subtraction, multiplication, division in a workplace setting.
- **Difficulty with place value** – can be challenging if working with spreadsheets and cost data.
- **Subitising** – has challenges with immediate recognition of a small quantity of items, for example in a set without counting.
- **Remembering basic facts despite repetition** – potentially creating challenges for undertaking calculations or creating formulas in spreadsheets.
- **Sequencing and number patterns** – remembering times tables or the order to numbers for example a key code or telephone number.
- **Estimating** – challenges estimating quantities such as size, magnitude, or distance.



- **Working Memory** – dyscalculics can struggle to hold on to multiple steps to carry out mental calculations or recall number sequences they may be only able to hold on to part of the calculation at one time making it harder to carry out a calculation.
- **Telling time** – particularly using an analogue clock or calculating time across time zones.
- **Time keeping** – challenges with the awareness of time passing.

Strengths

Examples of strengths dyscalculic individuals can bring to work:

Creativity – tend to be creative and have good imagination skills.

Strategic thinking – see situations holistically, enabling them to identify the essential elements and not just focus on one element or the minor details.

Practical ability – very hands on and practical in their approach to tasks.

Problem solving – good at strategic thinking and can think ‘outside of the box’. This provides unique insight and methods for solving problems.

Love of words – good at reading, writing, and spelling.

Intuitive thinking – good at interpreting what is going on in the environment around them processing knowledge, experiences, and signs around them.

Strategies to support at work

Learn about Dyscalculia – Increase your awareness and understanding of dyscalculia by reading about the condition, invite colleagues with lived experience from your organisation to share their personal stories if they are comfortable to do so, or attend an Awareness Session to learn more about dyscalculia.

Managers can support by:

Written summary – create a culture where written summaries go alongside numerical data and where only necessary data is presented, avoiding overwhelm.

Share in advance – share numerical data in advance of a meeting to give your colleague time to review and ask questions in advance.

Review meetings – as part of one-to-ones, consider setting up review meetings to check accuracy of work.

Visual representations – convert data to visual representation such as graphs or pie charts or real-world objects to describe concepts.

Assistive technology – enabling your colleagues to have access to assistive technologies to support such as a speaking calculator, or time zone software.

Time to practice – there may be work which requires the same type of calculations, giving your colleague extra time to practice and master these calculations will be beneficial. This will also build their confidence.

Guidelines – create guidelines to enable your colleague to follow step-by-step specific processes or calculations they may need. Breaking tasks down, using images or colour coding may be helpful.

Templates – for common costing calculations such as an expenses form with mileage cost which are automatically calculated.

Formulas – ensure any required formulas are already set up in excel requiring only input of numerical information which is automatically calculated.

Colleague Support

Checking – offer support to review calculations if your colleague is unsure.

Guidance – your colleague may require additional support carrying out some numerical work

Support available for colleagues with dyscalculia

Break problems down into chunks – tackling a number problem in parts will be less overwhelming and will allow you to check each part for accuracy before continuing.

Notepad – to jot down calculations.

Reach out for support – identify a colleague or speak to your manager if you need to check accuracy.

Create a crib sheet – of common formulas, calculations, telephone numbers you will need for your role and examples of how to use them.

Planning software – to support organisation, set reminders and notifications to help with time management.

Support network – find out if there is an employee support group for neurodivergent colleagues at work or look for a network outside of work, where dyscalculic individuals share first-hand experiences and tips for everyday support.

Assistive technology – consider what accessibility software is available which can allow you to say numbers or hear back the numbers you have typed in to minimising errors. Software to support with visual planning and using colour codes.



Consider a diagnosis – if you have not received a diagnosis. You may wish to consider a diagnosis. This can be conducted by a suitably qualified psychologist registered with HCPC or a SpLD Assessor with a valid Assessment Practicing Certificate approved by SASC. Having a diagnosis will help you understand where your specific challenges and give you a strong basis for advocating for support at work.

Personal wellbeing and strengths – It may take you longer to work with numbers, you still offer a lot to your organisations. Be kind to yourself and remember what strengths you bring to work such as your interpersonal skills, written skills, and creativity.

Support available

Workplace Adjustments

Everyone who wants to work should be able to work. Workplace adjustments seek to remove barriers to work due to a person's disability. A diagnosis of a neurodevelopmental condition is not required to access support at work.

What is a disability?

Under the Equality Act 2010 if a person's impairment has a substantial and long-term impact on their ability to carry out normal daily activities then that would be covered under the act.

The Act does not list specific conditions, and an individual does not need to be diagnosed with a specific condition to be able to access support from their organisation.

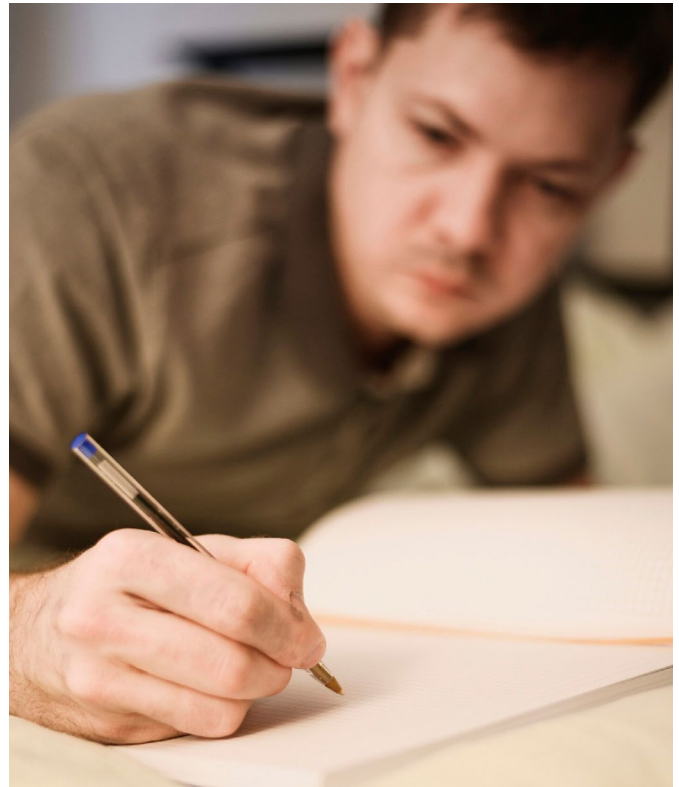
We know from case law that neurodevelopmental conditions such as dyslexia, DCD, ADHD, Autism are encompassed by the act.

Duty of Care. All employers are legally obligated to take reasonable steps in ensuring the health, safety, and wellbeing of their employees. This includes physical safety and mental health and wellbeing.

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, sets out an employer's duty to, as reasonably practical, the health, safety, and welfare of their employees.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 details responsibilities such as carrying out risk assessments and putting in place appropriate control measures.

The Equality Act prohibits discrimination, harassment, and victimisation on various protected characteristics, including disability and mental health. The Act provide protection against discrimination and the right to reasonable accommodations.



If employers neglect their legal responsibilities this can lead to legal claims, financial penalties, and reputational damage.

What is a reasonable adjustment?

These are changes made by employers to remove or reduce the effect of someone's disability so they can do their job or apply for a job. They can be for employees, contractors, self-employed or job applicants.

It is important to include the individual in the discussions as to what adjustments can be made so they feel included in the process and to ensure there are no assumptions.



Factors to consider when deciding what is reasonable:

- The effectiveness of the adjustment in removing or reducing the disadvantage
- Is the adjustment practical to make
- The cost of making the adjustment – is it affordable
- Could adjustment harm the health and safety of others
- The organisations size and resources
- Option of external funding such as Access to Work (see below)

It should be noted; the employer does not have to change the basic nature of the job.

By law employers must make reasonable adjustments when:

- They know, or could reasonably be expected to know, someone is disabled
- A disabled staff member or job applicant asks for adjustments
- Someone who is disabled is having difficulty with any part of their job
- Someone's absence record, sickness record or delay in returning to work is because of, or linked to, their disability

The employer must also:

- make reasonable adjustments for anything linked to someone's disability – for example, an organisation might not allow dogs at work but make a reasonable adjustment for someone with an assistance dog.
- make sure other people do what is needed for a reasonable adjustment to work – for example, if someone needs information presented in a certain format, making sure other people at work do that.

(ACAS, 2024)¹⁹

Beyond the legal context

Putting adjustments in place should not just be about meeting legal requirements. Organisations should seek to put in place policies and procedures to give clear guidance on required actions. Taking a proactive, early intervention approach, demonstrates you are recognising and supporting your colleague. This sends out a positive message that you value them and their wellbeing and want to help them perform at their best.

Benefits of adjustments

- Your colleague will feel valued because they are being supported
- Improve employee experiences of working at your organisation which can aid retention
- Lead to higher levels of productivity and reduce sickness absence
- Creates a culture where inclusion matters and is respected

Assessing for adjustments

Employee's needs are unique and dependent on many factors such as: job role, daily tasks, the environment in which they work, size of the organisation and affordability of adjustments.

Access to Work Grant

This is a government funded grant which an employee can apply for support such as specialist equipment or software, training in using the software, awareness training, and strategy coaching.

- The number of employees in the organisation dictates the size of the grant available.
- Access to Work will not pay for reasonable adjustments.
- Funding is assessed on a case-by-case basis. A diagnosis is not required to access funding.



Workplace Needs Assessment

Not all colleagues will be able to articulate or advocate for themselves, they may have a few challenges or struggle to know what support is available to them. A referral for a Workplace Needs Assessment such as through your Occupational Health provider can provide a clear framework of support.

A Workplace Needs Assessment is conducted by a workplace needs assessor. They will obtain feedback on performance from the manager and the employee. Consider areas of strength and challenge at work and make recommendations for adjustments which could be strategy coaching, assistive technology or low or no cost strategies that could be implemented straight away. A tailored report is provided and forms a key document with recommendations of adjustments the business can consider.

Examples of Workplace Adjustments

Assistive Technology

- Speech to Text (dictation software)
- Text to speech (screen readers)
- Captions or subtitles
- Planning or organisation software such as mind mapping software.
- Screen magnifiers, background tints.
- Assistive Technology Training in how to use the equipment in line with tasks.

Coaching

- Strategy coaching with a neurodiversity specialist coach, supporting your colleague to develop strategies to support areas of challenge at work.
- Co-coaching for the manager and neurodivergent team member with a neurodiversity specialist coach, to support adaptations at work and foster a collaborative approach to ways of working.

Ergonomic Equipment

- Keyboard
- Mouse
- Foot-rocker
- Standing desk
- Noise cancelling headphones
- Monitors

Work Environment

- Flexible working hours, hybrid or working from home
- Fixed desk
- Changing the lighting

Task Management

- Distributing work differently
- Frequent breaks
- Alternative communication methods, email vs phone calls

Awareness Training

- Awareness training to understand neurodivergent conditions available for colleagues and managers.

Additional Support

Counselling and EAP

If you are having challenges with your mental health, you may benefit from working with a counsellor. There are different approaches dependent preference and requirements:

- **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) or Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT)** can be helpful to support with changes and reframing aspects of your life and emotions.
- **EMDR – Eye movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing** can support you if you have experienced traumatic events and can be integrated into counselling sessions.

- **EAP – Employee Assistance Programme** - can offer programmes that help with negative thought patterns, low confidence, and self-esteem, as well as other issues.

Diagnosis or Screening for neurodivergence

Screening – if you have not received a formal diagnosis and would like to explore the likelihood of, for example, ADHD or Autism it is likely to be quicker, simpler, and less expensive to go through a screening assessment. Although this is not a formal clinical diagnosis it can provide an indication if you have characteristics associated with ADHD or Autism. It can be helpful to explore this in relation to the challenges you are facing at work. This should be conducted by an appropriately qualified practitioner such as a psychologist.

Diagnosis – a full clinical diagnosis can be obtained through the NHS or privately. The first stage is to have an initial discussion with your GP.

For ADHD, you will be assessed by a psychiatrist. Medication is a personal choice which some people find helpful to improve focus, attention, emotional regulation, and **executive functioning**. Talking therapies are also recommended as a way to manage ADHD.

For autism, you will be seen by a multidisciplinary team who will assess your history and usually involves speaking to someone who knows you since childhood such as a parent or guardian to help formulate a conclusion.

Adjustments Passport or Tailored Adjustment Plan

A **Work Adjustments Passport** which is also known as a Tailored Adjustment Plan is a live document that can be changed and adapted. The employee owns the document, and they can decide who they wish to share it with, for example, a new line manager or with a change of role. The passport should be reviewed regularly. Confidentiality must be respected.

At PAM Wellness we recommend a yearly review of a work adjustments passport. For example, this could take place during a performance review, or if there is a substantial change in the employee's work demands, tasks, environment, or health.

What should I do if a member of my team needs workplace adjustments?

- Hold a one-to-one meeting. Meet somewhere confidential to discuss specific challenges and what adjustments they think might help.
 - Agree next steps
 - Some adjustments should be simple to implement (dependent on role requirements), such as, a change of desk position or flexible working arrangements.
- Consult policy guidelines and company process for implementation of adjustments
 - Do you have a catalogue of approved software.
- If there are several challenges or requirements, or if you are unsure of how best to support your colleague refer to HR or Occupational Health for a Workplace Needs Assessment.
 - A tailored report will be produced with recommendations, these suggested adjustments should be discussed with the employee and agree what can reasonably be implemented.
 - A work adjustments passport or tailored adjustment plan can be completed and owned by the employee.
- Ensure regular check-ins to check progress and general wellbeing. Be patient as adjustments to new ways of working can take time to get used to.



Improving Accessibility at Work

Sometimes minor changes of low or no cost can make a significant difference to the working lives of neurodivergent employees. Adapting day-to-day working practices and normalising adaptations can not only benefit your neurodivergent colleagues but can potentially benefit all team members.

Inclusive Meetings

- Be clear on etiquette of the meetings, what is considered acceptable
- Ability to stand and move around during meetings
- Option to have camera off, if appropriate
- Use digital features to support online meetings such as raising hand or using the chat feature to post questions. These options are helpful if your neurodivergent colleague may struggle to articulate verbally or lack confidence in speaking up
- Send agendas in advance and a bullet pointed summary after
- Use transcription software and /or recording software to capture the meeting which can be reviewed later
- Enable people to send an email after with any additional thoughts.



Inbuilt accessibility software

Consider the accessibility features already installed on work computers or laptops.

Examples include:

- Screen readers
- Dictation function
- Grammar and spelling checker
- Text size
- Screen tint in various colours
- Colour filters
- Captions and transcription software for online meetings

Inclusive Hiring Practices

The Westminster AchieveAbility Survey²⁰ stated:

'Recruitment and selection procedures are too literacy-based resulting in working memory overload.'

Traditional forms of selection can cause unintentional barriers, so it is important to consider what the job role requires. Questions to consider when drawing up a selection criterion: Are you selecting for skills, experience, critical thinking, analytical or effective communication skills? Would you consider transferable skills?

A job analysis is a method which can provide a clear understanding of the specific requirements for a role on which to base the job description and skills requirements.



The Job Advert

Think about the wording in your adverts for example 'fast paced' 'constantly changing environment' may appeal to someone with ADHD but an Autistic colleague may find the constant changes overwhelming. Do the words truly reflect the role? Does the role need to be fast paced?

- Avoid jargon
- Be clear on expectations in the role
- Is the role flexible - be clear on the parameters.

Application Process: Things to consider

- Is it online or option of paper form?
- Are the text boxes limited to a word count – this can be challenging for neurodivergent individuals
- Is there a statement on the advert or application about your equal opportunities policy?
- Can the application be read by a screen reader
- Is there an option to disclose their neurodivergence on the form

Selection Methods

Interview

- Dependent on the job role, you may wish to consider providing questions in advance
- Ensure questions are relevant to the role
- Allow additional time to answer questions
- Ability for the candidate to write notes

Alternative section methods

These would enable a neurodivergent candidate to demonstrate their skills in a way that may not be captured in more traditional selection processes:

- Pre-recorded video presentation
- Opportunity to be assessed on exercises based on work samples
- Work trials – on the job experience

Creating an inclusive workplace

Employee Resource Group – providing internal support to colleagues with disabilities including neurodivergent colleagues. Providing an opportunity to come together and share lived experience, offer support, hints and tips which can help at work. They can be your internal expert panel to provide insights into improving inclusion.

Allies and Champions – as an ally you may not share your colleague's condition or be an expert, but the key thing is you are willing to listen, learn and support your neurodivergent colleagues and champion inclusion to make positive changes. This will help build trust and give neurodivergent colleagues the confidence to speak up.

Awareness training - learn more about neurodivergent conditions so you can support colleagues at work, understand typical traits and challenges at work but remember every neurodivergent person's experience is unique and they can also bring several strengths to their roles.

Avoiding unintentional barriers - seek to collaborate with your neurodivergent colleagues listen to their views, ideas, or suggestions. Through taking account of their lived experience, you can learn more about ways you or your organisation can adapt to ensure a greater level of inclusion. Involve them in creating policies, recruitment, onboarding, and career development pathways to remove unintentional barriers.



Hearing all voices - Remember not everyone may feel comfortable talking in a group meeting or planning session. Make sure different routes are available to ensure all voices are heard.

Offer multi-sensory training - Videos, practical learning, audio with captions, infographics, discussion groups, or learning circles are all options. The more interactive the better your colleague will be at remembering the information.

Break up courses in to chunks allow time to consolidate information. Ensure training materials are accessible with screen readers, to enable listening instead of reading. Use Alt-Text to describe pictures in manuals or on slides.

Clear and concise communications - think about the style of communication, avoid lengthy emails, try and keep information succinct, use bullet points, and avoid jargon.

Avoid multitasking – many neurodivergent individuals struggle with multiple tasks or streams of work. Consider how projects or work tasks are planned out, it may be better for your colleague to work on one task and complete it before taking on another. Discuss how best to support your colleague with prioritising their day such as chunking their workday to focus on certain aspects of a task, rather than try and juggle competing demands.

Universal Design at Work

The principle of universal design is the creation of accessible products, systems, and environments both physical and digital, for people with diverse abilities. Enabling easy access, understanding and usability for all.

To be a truly inclusive workplace takes time. However, organisations should consider how they can embed universal design principles to ensure their workplace is inclusive for all.



Onward support

For Neurodiversity Support, Health, and Wellbeing:

PAM Group

- Workplace Needs Assessment
- Assistive Technology Supply
- Assistive Technology Training
- Neurodiversity Specialist Coaching
- Awareness Training for Neurodiversity
- Neurodiversity Consultancy Services
- Health and Wellbeing Webinars
- Vision and Hearing
- EAP
- Counselling
- Physiotherapy
- Ergonomic Equipment

For Government Funding

- **UK: Access to Work**
[Access to Work: get support if you have a disability or health condition: What Access to Work is - GOV.UK](#)
- **Ireland: Work and Access**
[Work and Access | National Enterprise Hub](#)
- **Ireland Private Sector Grant: Workplace Equipment Adaptation Grant**
[gov.ie - Operational Guidelines: Workplace Equipment Adaptation Grant \(WEAG\)](#)

Charities:

ADHD

- **UK:** <https://www.adhdfoundation.org.uk/>
- **Ireland:** [ADHD Ireland | Our Mission is to make life better for people affected by ADHD](#)

Autism:

- **UK:** [National Autistic Society](#)
- **Ireland:** [Home Page - Irish Society for Autism](#)

Dyslexia:

- **UK:** <https://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/>
- **Ireland:** [Dyslexia Ireland | Supporting Children & Adults with Dyslexia](#)

DCD/Dyspraxia

- **UK:** [Dyspraxic Adults](#)
- **Ireland:** [Dyspraxia/DCD Ireland - Home](#)

Glossary of Terms

Burnout – is a state of physical and emotional exhaustion.

DSM-5 – Diagnostic and Statistical Manual is a professional references book for diagnosing mental health and brain-related conditions.

EAP – Employee Assistance Programme – offered by organisations to their employees. EAPs are usually 24-hour confidential counselling and health and wellbeing support services.

Executive Functions – The cognitive ability to plan how to do a task, how to devise strategies, apply them to different settings and self-monitor performance.

Masking²¹ – Masking is a strategy used by some autistic people, consciously or unconsciously, to appear non-autistic.

Meltdown²² – occurs when someone becomes completely overwhelmed by their current situation and temporarily loses behavioural control. This loss of control can be verbal (e.g. shouting, screaming, crying) or physical (e.g. kicking, lashing out, biting) or both.

Neurodevelopmental – refers to developmental conditions which affect the brain during the developmental stage and are often first recognised in childhood.

Neurodivergent – refers to individuals who identify or have been diagnosed with one or more neurodevelopmental conditions listed in this tool kit.

Neurodiversity – The term has expanded since its original inception and is a term which recognises we all present with different neurocognitive abilities and covers the full spectrum of neurotypes from neurotypical to neurodivergent.

Neurominorities – a group of neurodivergent individuals who share the same neurodivergence such as autism or dyslexia and are in some way disadvantaged by societal norms.

Neurotypical – an individual whose neurotype fits into what is considered conventionally typical by current standards.

Phonological processing – refers to the ability to recognise and manipulate the sounds of spoken language. It is essential for understanding how sounds combine to form words which is crucial for reading and writing.

SASC – SpLD Assessment Standards Committee is a representative organisation for professionally qualified diagnostic assessors of specific learning difficulties (SpLD)

Shutdown²³ – A shutdown appears less intense to the outside world but can be equally debilitating. Shutdowns are also a response to being overwhelmed but may appear more passive - e.g. an autistic person going quiet or 'switching off'.

Stimming²⁴ – Stimming or self-stimulating behaviour includes arm or hand-flapping, finger-flicking, rocking, jumping, spinning, or twirling, head-banging and complex body movements. It includes the repetitive use of an object, such as flicking a rubber band or twirling a piece of string, or repetitive activities involving the senses (such as repeatedly feeling a particular texture).

Work Adjustments Passport – this is a live document which details agreed adjustments between the neurodivergent individual and their manager or HR, to support with work tasks.

Working Memory – is a cognitive process that involves holding on to a limited amount of information in the short term while the information is being used or processed. Working memory is susceptible to emotion, stress, or distraction.

Workplace Needs Assessment – conducted by a trained assessor they work with the employee and their manager to understand the job role and where challenges arise. This enabled the assessor to recommend specific adjustments which would be beneficial to support a neurodivergent individual in the role.

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