

NEURODIVERSITY TOOLKIT

Introduction

The Neurodiversity Toolkit aims to help individuals, teams and managers to recognise and maximise the contribution of neurodivergent individuals to the workplace. By using the tips and advice we hope that individuals can flourish and work to their full potential. In addition we hope that any challenges at work can be quickly and easily resolved.



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How to use this toolkit

The toolkit is split into 5 sections:

1. Introduction to Neurodiversity

- This section explains the term neurodiversity and the benefits of understanding more about it – for individuals, managers, colleagues and the organisation
- It also covers workplace adjustments, disability confidence and etiquette and how to spot an issue in the workplace. It is recommended that everyone read this section before using the rest of the guidance

2. Self-help guide

- This includes a self-help questionnaire designed to direct individuals to relevant advice quickly and easily. Some people may wish to read all of it
- Individuals are encouraged identify potential workplace adjustments they think would be of benefit to them or that could resolve an issue, then discuss these with their line-manager.

3. Line Managers guide

- Line-managers are encouraged to use this guide to understand how they can make workplace adjustments for neuro-divergent individuals.
- Firstly to enable those individuals to work more effectively and achieve their full potential and secondly to resolve any workplace issues.

4. Tools and techniques

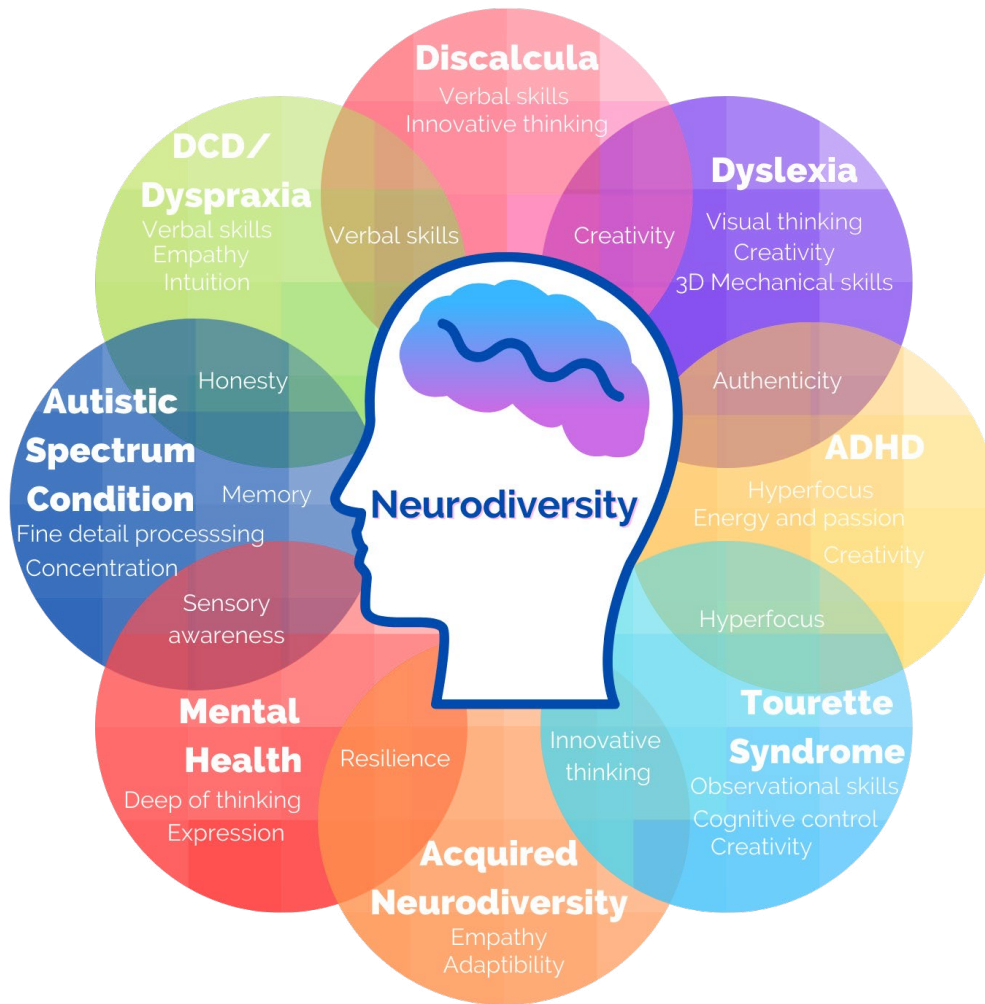
- This section gives added detail and advice for both individual and managers to enable more effective use of the equipment resources or techniques referred to in the guides.

5. Fact sheets

- Finally the last section includes fact sheets about a number of conditions under the neuro-diversity umbrella. These give an overview of the condition plus basic tips and advice

This guidance is designed to complement other support services available in your organisation, such as:

- Employee Assistance Programme
- Occupational Health Service
- Human resources or Employee Relations
- Unions representatives



What is Neurodiversity?

The word neurodiversity is used because we recognise these neurological differences give people different skills, abilities and ways of seeing the world which can present both advantages and disadvantages in the workplace.

A quote from Harvard medical School summarises it quite nicely:

“Neurodiversity describes the idea that people experience and interact with the world around them in many different ways; there is no one “right” way of thinking, learning, and behaving, and differences are not viewed as deficits.”

Neurodiversity is also an umbrella term referring to a group of neurological development conditions which share common features, in particular differences in how people learn and process information.

The term neurodiverse is a collective term, so a group of people, a community and a condition can be neurodiverse but a person is neurodivergent. But actually, not everyone who is neurodivergent is diagnosed with a condition and in this toolkit we will be discussing conditions but also focussing on strengths and areas of challenge across the whole neurodiverse community including those without a formal diagnosis. Those people without this different way of thinking are often referred to as neuro-typical or NT.



What do you need to know about Neurodiversity?

Benefit to the individual

- Understanding neurodiversity can help explain your skills and difficulties. This awareness can help you to work with your manager to find a better way of working
- You are likely to think differently so you may be able to find alternative solutions to problems and use unconventional methods to complete work tasks
- Your chances of promotion may be hampered by specific differences. Understanding your different needs and adjustments can increase your prospects.
- If you choose to share this information with colleagues it could create a more cohesive and effective team and a better working environment

(based on extract from Jo Todd –
The Hidden Disabilities Toolkit)

Benefit to the manager and employer

- You can realise the full potential of your staff with neurological differences. Their different way of thinking can be invaluable in completing tasks and solving problems
- Specific difficulties faced by your staff can be explained and resolved often simply quickly and cheaply.
- You will find it easier to understand and accept both the positive and negative aspects of your staff's neurological differences
- Understanding the differences better should help you to make less assumptions, ask better questions and suggest appropriate solutions to any difficulties
- By understanding their needs and making adjustments you can open up future development and career opportunities for your staff
- Individuals leaving education are likely to be more aware than ever about their conditions and the adjustments they need.

It is also worth noting that disability legislation (Equality Act 2010) gives the employer information about any legal obligations and reassurance to individual thinking about disclosing any difficulties or conditions.

There are benefits for anyone in organisation of developing a better understanding of neurodiversity including:

- Developing an inclusive and empathetic culture and supportive atmosphere
- Being better able to understand why someone may have a different approach to tasks
- Creating more cohesive and effective team-working
- Understanding and utilising individual's different strengths to achieve goals



Unleash the power of the Neurodiverse Brain

Why do I want to hire Neurodiverse people?

Some employers might worry about what that would mean to their workforce. I don't, I actually want to find neuro-diverse staff to work with me when I start hiring people and this is why.

I believe the most desirable quality in a workforce is that of diversity, and in particular - neurodiversity.

All eco-systems need diversity to flourish and a workplace can be just like any other living, breathing organism when seen as a whole. The more diversity within it, the more it will grow! The following views are the subjective views of a future employer about what the individual labels mean:

From Monique's Tips and Techniques Blog – Monique Crane (Coaching and Advocacy Service)

ASD / Autism

This person is probably able to work independently, they will be precise, like to follow routines and procedures, they will most likely be able to focus 100% on one task at a time and not settle till it's perfect. They will probably not join in the office gossip or get embroiled in office politics. They will not waste time at work trying to fit in socially so I won't be wasting money paying them while they sit there talking about the weather and popular TV shows instead of working.

Best of all, they are NOT yes men, which means that when asked for their opinion they will tell you the truth as they see it. The qualities displayed by people with Autism are consistent with qualities needed for inventors. I want people with creative vision in my workplace and that's why I feel that people with Autism are a most valuable resource to the employment market!

ADHD

This person will probably have a mind that is constantly on the go and is able to analyse multiple thoughts at a time. As a result they will most likely notice things that others would not. They will probably not be afraid to take on new challenges, so long as they are given interesting avenues to pursue. They usually have a strongly developed kinaesthetic sense, so will most likely be willing to do energetic things and will often have high pain thresholds so they probably won't even mind being on their feet all day. In fact, I would expect them to have excellent endurance, not just in their physical attributes but also in their mental capacities. When people with ADHD take on a project, they are capable of really taking it on, taking it home with them and thinking about the project in ways that others might miss.

The qualities displayed by people with ADHD are consistent with qualities needed for achievers, activists and fighters. I want people with these kind of passions and strengths in my workplace and that's why I feel that people with ADHD are also a true asset to any workforce!

Dyslexia

I would expect someone with dyslexia to be an 'out of the box' thinker. Most likely they will have an amazing visual memory, be creative and quite often be great at expressing themselves, be it through art, dance, photography, music, acting or sports. The benefits to having dyslexic staff are too many to list and I am not the only employer actively seeking people with these skills. Other businesses are now realising the benefits of employing people with dyslexia. Apparently their excellent spatial awareness, their creative potential and their 'entrepreneurial' minds are no longer the best kept secret in the employment market.

The qualities displayed by people with dyslexia are consistent with qualities needed for creative exploration and expression, qualities that are so valued to the business world. I want people with this kind of creativity in my workplace and that's why I feel that people with dyslexic qualities are also a true asset to any workforce!

Dyspraxia / DCD

I would expect people with dyspraxia to be the strategists of the group, the thinkers that not only think outside of the box but who wouldn't even be able to find it if you sent them looking for it! Their brains are often wired so differently that they will have had to find so many solutions for overcoming barriers that finding solutions to problems for them is an everyday thing which many even manage on a subconscious level. People with dyspraxia tend to have a sense of persistence and determination to succeed which is unmatched by most people.

The qualities displayed by people with dyspraxia are consistent with qualities needed for great strategists, they can break even simple tasks down into steps and chunks that anyone can follow. I want people with these kind of abilities in my workplace and that's why I feel that people with dyspraxia are also a true asset to any workforce!

No discrimination

Obviously I would not want to discriminate against neuro-typical thinkers. I would want to ensure I gave them ample opportunity to shine too. There are many things that neuro-typical people find easy that those of us who are more diverse thinkers struggle with so I certainly see the benefit in hiring them too. But for any employment sector to truly flourish it is diversity that makes them great.

The truth about the Neurodiverse workforce

Many people with these diagnosed differences know their own limitations and often put strategies in themselves to compensate for difficulties. Any changes required to the workplace to enable neuro-diverse thinkers to flourish in the work environment are usually minor and shouldn't deter other employers from seeing the great benefit that hiring neuro-diverse thinkers brings to their workforce.

Neurodiversity is the greatest untapped resource on earth. Share this to help others see the immense benefit that your diversity can bring!

So would I really be better off hiring Neurodiverse staff?

A neuro-diverse workforce can lead to innovation and progress in the business world which to me is a WIN for business.



Disability legislation and workplace adjustments in general

The Equality Act 2010 brought together over 116 separate pieces of legislation into one single act to give a legal framework to protect the rights of individuals and promoting a fair and more equal society. The act has 9 protected characteristics:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender
- Gender identity
- Maternity and paternity
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Race
- Religion
- Sexual orientation

The act uses the following definition of disability:

“A person has a disability if he or she has a physical or mental impairment and the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities”

The Equality Act 2010 builds on the previous Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and makes it unlawful for an employer to discriminate against disabled people in two ways. Firstly, employers must not discriminate against disabled people. Employers are also required to make ‘reasonable adjustments’ to prevent disabled people being placed at a disadvantage.

In employment employers should make workplace adjustments to make sure that, as far as is reasonable, a disabled worker has the same access to everything that is involved in doing and keeping a job as a non-disabled person.

There are three main types of adjustments:

- Changing the way things are done. This could be a change to a formal or informal policy, a rule or a practice or indeed a one-off decision
- Making changes to overcome barriers created by the physical features of your workplace. A physical feature of a building or other premises may make it more difficult for someone to access or use it. Changes include ramps, widening doorways, better lighting
- Providing extra equipment. Aids or equipment may be needed to help someone access or do something - e.g. ergonomic chair or software. Or they may need additional services. E.g. BSL interpreters or job coach

Many of these adjustments are free or low cost and can make a massive difference to someone’s ability to be effective in their job role. But more importantly

these changes can help colleagues work to their full potential and contribute more to the workplace.

Often making these changes can also benefit other colleagues and increase productivity generally by:

- Allowing all staff to contribute fully by creating a barrier free working environment
- Saves on recruitment costs because staff are loyal and stay longer
- Shows the organisation has an inclusive workforce
- Increase productivity among all employees
- Can bring in and develop improved ways of working and new technologies
- Reduces costs of sickness and absence
- Focuses on ability and potential
- Improves morale and engagement
- Promotes an equality and diversity aware company
- Attracts new talent to the business

As an organisation it is good practice to be aware of and address the 4 types of workplace barriers:

- Institutional including a lack of policies, procedures or practices e.g. not providing or reviewing workplace adjustments
- Environmental including restricted accessibility or not implementing workplace adjustments e.g. only having upstairs meeting rooms, or instructions not being in plain language
- Attitudinal including individual's stereotypes and perceptions of disabled people e.g. colleagues believing disabled colleagues are not as productive
- Communication including verbal, written and electronic communication e.g. not having Easy-read versions of documents if required, or not providing a support worker or interpreter if needed

It is better to consider these barriers as you develop working practices rather than having to create them in response to an issue or problem.



Disability Confidence

Did you know 1 in 4 of us will develop a disability during our working lives? And 80% of people weren't born with their disability with the majority developing their disability during adulthood?

You may not immediately be aware that a colleague has a disability as many disabilities are hidden – these include a number of neuro-developmental conditions. Even if you know a bit about a condition, don't assume you know how it affects your colleague. Conditions affect everyone differently and these effects can be mild, moderate or severe and vary depending on other factors in their lives. The best way to find out about how a condition or disability affects someone and how you can help is to ask the person – they are the expert in their own disability.

If you are aware that a colleague has a disability here are few Do's and Don'ts of disability etiquette:

Don't:

- avoid disabled colleagues because you are worried about saying the wrong thing
- be worried about asking about your colleagues disability
- make assumptions about what your colleagues can and can't do
- refer to someone as suffering from a condition as this is judging them
- talk to a supporter before your colleague
- stare at any adjustment or equipment provided to help
- lean on or use any specialist equipment yourself
- refer to normal and disabled

Do:

- have a conversation and learn more about the person and their condition
- ask about it but respect their decision not to discuss it if they don't want to. Don't make it your only topic of conversation though
- ask if they want any help – they will tell what help they need IF ANY
- use the term “has” a condition instead, but actually most of the time you would not define someone by their disability or condition anyway
- speak to your colleague and if needed they will ask their supporter for help
- focus on the individual, talk to your colleague before speaking to other people involved with them
- remember your colleague's equipment is set up specifically for them
- use disabled and non-disabled, but actually it is better not to use any label or differentiation unless you need to

If you are a line manager it is good practice to:

- Take time to understand the impact of your staff member's condition
- Find out more about the condition if you need to
- Ask about what support or adjustments they need and put these in place
- Constantly review the effectiveness of these adjustments particularly after changes
- Promote and open and supportive work culture and raise staff awareness and acceptance generally

Please remember: someone with a disability may approach tasks in a different way but achieve the same or even better results.



Spotting an issue

How do you know if you or a colleague are struggling?

When do you need to consider workplace adjustments?

Hopefully everyone who joins your organisation will be asked about their support needs and adjustments they might need to the workplace. However sometimes people are reluctant to disclose and discuss needing help. Sometimes people may not realise they need help or indeed may not need help until they have been working for a while.

There are some signs you can look out for which may indicate that you or your colleague may be struggling:

- Avoids certain tasks
- Stops doing tasks they had previously done
- Avoids certain areas of the building
- Avoids certain people or group situations
- Avoids using certain pieces of equipment or certain processes
- Starts missing meetings and deadlines
- Becomes less punctual
- Is absent more often
- Is absent on certain days of the week
- Becomes forgetful
- Becomes grumpy and irritable
- Becomes introverted and withdrawn
- Becomes emotional
- Looks tired all the time
- Stops taking pride in personal appearance

If you notice several of these in yourself it might be time to speak to your line manager about the difficulties you are having. If you notice this in a colleague then you might suggest they speak to their line manager

If you are a line manager and someone in your team shows several of these signs it might be time to discuss the support or adjustments they might need in the workplace. Or if they have adjustments already, it might be time for a review of their effectiveness.

Please remember that these conversations should be handled with sensitivity and confidentiality; not everyone appreciates having their disabilities 'highlighted', especially if it's not clear to them that there is a problem.



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