Time for Thriving

NeuroPathways CLINIC

Understanding Neurodiversity at Work

Building an inclusive, informed and thriving workplace for everyone

For Managers, HR and Organisational Leads

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What is Neurodiversity?

Understanding Neurodiversity and Neurodevelopmental Differences

Neurodiversity is a way of understanding that all brains work differently, and these differences are a natural and important part of being human. It highlights that conditions like autism, ADHD, or dyslexia are not problems to be fixed but unique ways of thinking, learning, and experiencing the world.

What are Neurodevelopmental Disorders?

These are conditions that affect how the brain develops and works, leading to differences in how people behave, communicate, and learn.

Here are some examples:

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD): Often involves challenges with social communication and repetitive behaviours.

ADHD (Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder): Makes it harder to focus, sit still, or manage impulses.

Dyslexia: Affects reading and writing skills but often comes with strengths in creative or big-picture thinking.

Dyspraxia: Impacts coordination, making it harder to plan physical movements.

Tourette Syndrome: Involves tics, such as repetitive sounds or movements.

1 in 7

people in the UK are Neurodivergent

Doyle, N. (2020). Neurodiversity at work: a biopsychosocial model and the impact on working adults. British Medical Bulletin.

1 in 5

people in the UK have a learning difference

Local Government Association (2020)

60+%

of Neurodivergent Adults were not diagnosed as children

Nylander et al. (2021). Childhood diagnoses in individuals identified as autistic in adulthood. Autism Research.

Recognising Strengths

Common Strengths Neurodivergent Colleagues May Bring:

- Pattern Recognition
- Hyperfocus & Deep Expertise
- Creative Problem-Solving
- Attention to Detail
- Lateral Thinking
- Honesty & Direct Communication

Late diagnosis is more common than you think.
Many adults spent decades being told they were lazy, anxious, or just not trying hard enough. In reality, they were neurodivergent in a world not designed for their brain. A diagnosis at any age can be life-changing, not as a label, but as an explanation.

30%
more productive
Deloitte: teams with neurodivergent professionals in some roles

75%
more likely to innovate
Neuroinclusive orgs: ideas progress from concept to product (Deloitte)

87%
better decisions

90%+
retention rate

What can we do to support?

For Managers

Day-to-Day Practice

- Have a regular, structured 1:1 with every direct report - not just when there are problems
- Share agendas and key questions before meetings so people can prepare
- Follow verbal instructions with a written summary or email
- Give feedback that is specific, concrete and timely - not vague or implied
- Break complex tasks into clear steps with explicit priorities and deadlines
- Ask “how do you work best?” rather than assuming one approach suits everyone

Disclosure & Adjustments

- Create a culture where disclosure feels safe - model openness yourself
- Never require disclosure - focus on what support someone needs, not the label
- Act on reasonable adjustment requests promptly; delays send a message
- Treat adjustments as confidential - do not share with the wider team without consent
- Review adjustments regularly - needs change over time
- Know your HR and occupational health referral process - it exists to support you too

Watch Out For

- Performance managing someone for behaviours that are actually symptoms (e.g. missing verbal instructions, being blunt)
- Inconsistency: applying flexibility for some but not others
- Assuming silence means agreement or understanding
- Micromanaging in response to differences rather than addressing the underlying need
- Making adjustments feel like a burden or a favour, rather than a right
- Only 51% of managers appreciate the value of neurodiversity (CIPD, 2024) - be the exception

Reasonable Adjustments: Simple Changes, Big Impact

Under the Equality Act 2010, employers have a duty to make reasonable adjustments for neurodivergent employees where their condition meets the definition of disability.

Environment
- Quiet workspaces or noise-cancelling headphones
- Adjustable lighting
- Reduced sensory distractions

Communication
- Written summaries after verbal meetings
- Clear agendas in advance
- Extra processing time for responses

Technology
- Text-to-speech tools
- Spell-check and grammar support
- Task management apps and visual planners

Management Style
- Regular structured 1:1s
- Written tasks rather than verbal-only
- Clear, specific feedback - not implied

Flexible Working
- Flexible start/finish times
- Option to work from home
- Breaks to prevent sensory fatigue

Recruitment
- Job previews before interviews
- Extra time for assessments • Alternative formats (written vs verbal)

Why Language Matters

The words we use shape how people feel about themselves and how included they feel in their environment. Using respectful and accurate language can:

- Reduce stigma
- Support identity and self-expression
- Promote understanding and inclusion
- Help people feel seen, valued and respected

Everyone has the right to describe themselves in the way that feels most comfortable to them.

Do's

Ask people their preference
Language preferences can vary. Respect how someone chooses to describe themselves.

Use identity-respecting language
Terms like neurodivergent are often preferred because they focus on difference rather than deficit.

Focus on strengths as well as challenges
Neurodivergent experiences include creativity, deep focus, problem-solving and unique perspectives.

Use "neurodiverse" for groups
For example: "Our team is neurodiverse."

Be open to learning
Language evolves, and being willing to listen and adapt helps create inclusive environments.

Don't

Don't assume someone's preferred language
Not everyone uses the same terms.

Don't describe neurodivergence only as a deficit or problem
Avoid language that frames individuals as "broken" or needing to be "fixed".

Don't use "neurodiverse" for one person
It refers to groups, not individuals.

Don't label people without their input
Respect autonomy and identity.

Don't focus only on diagnoses
A person is more than a label.

Different brains make the world more creative, interesting and innovative.

Common Workplace Challenges

Many workplace barriers affect neurodivergent AND neurotypical colleagues, addressing them helps everyone.

Gallup research (2025): The top shared challenges for all employees are: lack of control over work, noisy environments, and unclear direction. Neurodivergent employees experience these more intensely, but the challenges themselves are universal.

Sensory overload
Open-plan offices, fluorescent lighting, background noise

Unclear communication
Ambiguous instructions, unwritten social rules, implied expectations

Rigid work structures
Fixed hours, one-size-fits-all processes, inflexible environments

Traditional interviews
76% of ND job seekers say standard recruitment puts them at a disadvantage

Fear of disclosure
65% of neurodivergent employees in the UK fear discrimination at work despite employers promoting inclusive workplaces *(Birkbeck University 2023)*

Microaggressions
Growing evidence of daily microaggressions and lower psychological safety *(City & Guilds 2026 Index)*

What can we do to support?

- **Don't assume a colleague understood** something just because you said it once, verbally

- **Use clear, direct language,** say what you mean rather than hinting or implying

- **Ask "how do you prefer to receive feedback / instructions?"** rather than assuming one way works for everyone

- **Give people time to process** and respond not everyone thinks best on the spot

- **Try not to interpret quietness, bluntness, or a different social style** as rudeness or disinterest

- **If someone asks an "obvious" question or needs something repeated, answer** without making them feel small

Common Workplace Challenges

Unclear communication

Ambiguous instructions, unwritten social rules, implied expectations

Ambiguous instructions

A manager says: **"Can you sort out the report before the meeting?"** No mention of which report, which meeting, what "sort out" means (write it from scratch? proofread it? format it?), or by when.

A neurotypical colleague might fill in the gaps from context or just ask casually.

For someone who processes language more literally, this instruction is genuinely incomplete and asking for clarification can feel socially risky if the culture implies you "should just know.“

Unwritten social rules

In many offices there's an unspoken rule that you don't eat strong-smelling food at your desk, that you make small talk with new people in the kitchen, or that staying late signals dedication even if your work is done.

Nobody tells you these rules. They're absorbed gradually through observation and social instinct. For neurodivergent colleagues, particularly autistic people these invisible norms can be exhausting to decode, and breaking them unintentionally can lead to social friction or even reputational damage with no understanding of why.

Implied expectations

A colleague sends a message saying: **"No worries, it's fine."**

The implied meaning, which many people read instantly, is actually "I'm a bit annoyed but I'm not going to say so directly."
Or a manager says "it would be great if someone could volunteer for this" when they actually mean "I expect one of you to step up."

For someone who takes language at face value, the gap between what's said and what's meant can cause genuine misunderstandings, and they may later be judged for responses that were entirely logical given what was literally communicated.

Understanding how your people think, work and learn - so they can thrive with clarity, confidence and the right support

Delivered by accredited professionals, our assessments offer:

- A detailed clinical interview exploring strengths, challenges and developmental history
- Evidence-based diagnostic tools
- Consideration of workplace environments and daily functioning
- Clear explanations, tailored recommendations and next steps
- A comprehensive report to guide reasonable adjustments (with employee consent)

Accurate, compassionate assessment is the first step in helping neurodivergent employees understand themselves and receive appropriate support in the workplace.

Have you enjoyed this toolkit?

Visit our websites to book a Discovery Call

TIMEFORTHRIVING.CO.UK

NEUROPATHWAYSCLINIC.CO.UK

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Call: 0330 202 0283

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