



national
autism
implementation
team

Beyond Accommodations: Supporting Autistic Professionals in Education

Practice based guide for employers and employees



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Foreword

I am late diagnosed. I had masked my difficulties for decades, first as a traumatised school pupil and then as a teacher, determined to improve things for learners. But despite working hard, joining in with nights out and staffroom banter, and throwing myself into the life of the school, I was always on the outside, looking in. It was exhausting, living as an inauthentic, hypervigilant version of myself. Diagnosis was both a relief, and a grieving process for the years spent struggling alone.

Schools, like many other places, can be hostile for autistic learners and staff. They are loud, bright and people-y, with countless demands, transitions and unspoken social rules. But there is a growing awareness of the need for schools to change how they include neurodivergent colleagues, and this wonderfully comprehensive Guide presents practical steps schools can take to make those changes. Written in respectful language, with clear presentation, the unequivocal neuro-affirming message is that with the right accommodations, autistic employees can thrive.

Please do read from cover to cover, whether you are an autistic employee looking to articulate your own needs, or an ally, hoping to share in the journey. In the pages you'll find compassionate, informed advice on things like environmental considerations, autistic masking, disclosing neurodivergence, and tips to support recruitment, which can be an excruciating process for autistic people. The appendix is crammed with useful tools for workplace adjustments and wellbeing.

Using this Guide will help autistic employees say, *“these are my sensory needs, my communication preferences and this is how I navigate my working life”*. To be truly inclusive, schools must accept and respect their neurodivergent staff, as well as learners. Cross-neuro understanding is a journey, but if we can create deeply inclusive learning landscapes, we have an opportunity to create inclusive, empathic communities and workplaces.

Jean Kocemba, Support for Learning Teacher

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Introduction

This guide is intended to support neurodivergent people working by providing information and practical suggestions based upon the views and preferences of neurodivergent adults.

Autistic people can have poor employment outcomes, are under-represented in the workforce, and often experience discrimination and poor mental health (Buckley et al., 2021; Bury et al., 2021; Wood et al., 2022). Employment is often precarious (short-term, part-time, low paid) and individuals are underemployed or overqualified for their current roles. Although, as not all autistic people are diagnosed or choose to share their autistic identity, the literature may not reflect the true picture.

It is therefore important that we increase our understanding of the challenges facing autistic people not only in gaining employment but within the workforce. This study draws on the experience of autistic professionals working in health and education because professionals working within health and education are well placed to become influential positive role models (Lawrence, 2019).

“One of the reasons I wanted to become a schoolteacher in the first place even before an autism diagnosis is because I had really bad experiences at school, and I didn’t want other people to go through the sort of education that I had.”

The guidance is based on information obtained during a review of published literature and interviews with thirty-four autistic people who work in professional roles within health and education in Scotland. They were asked about their experiences of training, recruitment, and employment, particularly factors that offered them support, and factors which challenged them. They also provided recommendations for improving training, recruitment, and employment for neurodivergent people in the future. The guide was also reviewed by people working in management and human resources roles across health and education.

This guide is intended to provide information which will support neurodivergent people in employment. Often adjustments to language, mindsets and actions do not cost money and can provide benefit to the whole diverse workforce.

Throughout this guide we have included direct quotations obtained during interviews with autistic professionals. This guide and the research on which it is based was conducted by a team which includes autistic and non-autistic researchers.

Although our focus has been on autistic people, it is well known that most autistic people experience co-occurring mental health and neurodevelopmental differences. Similar experiences are shared by people with ADHD or who identify as neurodivergent.

Language statement

There is a strong message from some autistic people that they prefer identity first language, e.g., autistic person. This preference has been considered throughout this guide.

This guide is based on interviews with autistic people. Quotations are included to provide examples of the autistic experience. We have not changed the language used by autistic people and therefore some quotations may not reflect neuro-affirming language.

Key messages

The following Key Messages for supporting autistic employees arose from the study:

- Embrace neurodiversity
- Understand masking
- Provide safe and trusting environments for disclosure
- Support self-advocacy and shared advocacy
- Provide and maintain reasonable adjustments and accommodations

Embrace neurodiversity

Autistic people may face stigma and discrimination in the workplace, which can negatively impact mental health and job performance.

Employers should foster a culture of acceptance by educating employees about autism, modelling, and promoting inclusivity and diversity, and providing resources for support and advocacy.



This means:

- **Listening to and learning from neurodivergent people about how we can all improve employment experiences.**
- **Actively creating a workplace culture where everyone feels accepted and valued and different neurotypes are expected.**
- **When you know about an individual's language preferences, using these respectfully.**
- **Recognising discrimination and challenging it.**
- **Being prepared to keep learning and reflecting on how well you understand what 'neuro-affirming' workplaces look and feel like for neurodivergent people.**

Key Messages

Understand masking

Masking is a coping or self-preservation strategy used by many neurodivergent individuals, as a kind of stigma management strategy to avoid being judged negatively for being themselves, and to prevent discrimination and harassment. It involves covering up or suppressing natural and actual internal feelings, preferences, and reactions to sensory, communication and social experiences. Sometimes this is a deliberate decision but often it is unconscious. Masking can serve a necessary purpose but is also immensely tiring and comes at a cost to mental health and wellbeing. Nearly 75% of autistic people surveyed, report masking all or some of the time to avoid being perceived as visibly autistic.



Provide safe and trusting environments for disclosure

When individuals choose to disclose, they should feel supported to be open about being autistic or neurodivergent. All staff should seek to create a safe and trusting environment for disclosure of diagnosis (formal diagnosis or self-identification). Disclosure is complicated and individuals have the right to choose whether they disclose, to whom and when, e.g., at interview, in training or at a point when they feel reasonable adjustments are required. Respect privacy and only share an individual's diagnosis with clear permission.



Colleagues and employees may recognise differences and consider someone might be neurodivergent but it's important not to try to diagnose or label other people in the workplace.

Aim to provide support that is not dependent on formal diagnosis.

Be understanding of the reasons why people choose to disclose being neurodivergent or not.

Key Messages

Support self-advocacy and shared advocacy

Create a culture where people feel safe to speak up about their needs, whether they are formally diagnosed or not. Employers should encourage neurodivergent individuals to self-advocate for their needs and provide opportunities for them to express their concerns and suggestions for improving the workplace. This can help to create a more supportive and inclusive environment for all employees. Although self-advocacy is positive, we should also remember that for some people, sometimes having to self-advocate is stressful and having others to advocate with you is also really important.



Provide and maintain reasonable adjustments and accommodations

Research found that less than half of autistic employees who discussed reasonable adjustments had them implemented (Davies et al., 2022; Heasman et al., 2020). A common theme in conversations with neurodivergent people is that accommodations are implemented as a one-off, or for a brief time and then forgotten about. Maintaining them as long as needed is crucial.



Employers should:

- **Be proactive, offering adjustments in advance, including for recruitment processes (e.g., extra processing time for interview and questions provided in advance).**
- **Work with neurodivergent employees to offer, provide and maintain reasonable adjustments that help them perform their job duties or role. These accommodations may include modifications to the physical environment, the social environment, social expectations, work routines, and communication.**
- **Actively ensure that agreed plans are being implemented, maintained, and reviewed regularly.**

Individuals may or may not know what adjustments they can ask for and what would be 'essential' or 'desirable', so managers and mentors should also be prepared to come with ideas and examples. Employee needs can change over time so there is a requirement for regular reviews of agreed adjustments to ensure they remain fit for purpose.

Think about being flexible employers and facilitating manageable workloads for all employees.

Neurodivergence

There are a range of ways that people are neurodivergent which commonly co-occur, such as autism, ADHD, intellectual disability, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, developmental co-ordination disorder (also known as dyspraxia), specific learning difficulties, and developmental language disorder. Although not all adults are identified or formally diagnosed, we now understand that,

- 2-3% of the population are autistic,
- 3-5% have ADHD,
- 10-15% of the population are neurodivergent.

Neurodivergent people are likely to experience co-occurrence of neurodevelopmental differences. Although these are not mental health conditions; because of being neurodivergent in a society designed for neurotypical requirements, mental ill-health including depression and anxiety also commonly co-occur.

Disclosure

"I don't tell people until I trust them as a person."

It is up to the individual whether they share their diagnosis/ identity or not. People are more likely to share their identity with understanding people whom they trust, within an inclusive, caring culture, or where it may gain them useful supports. They are unlikely to share their identity or diagnosis if they believe this will lead to them being excluded, shamed or to experience discrimination or stigma.



Neurodivergence

“My worry about disclosure is that whatever happens, it becomes about this autism thing.”

Some people find that disclosing their identity is a positive experience and can be helpful to other people in a comparable situation.

“All the staff are aware because I’ve disclosed to them that I’ve got autism. Also, the pupils as well, I’ve disclosed to them and that’s actually worked quite well because a lot of them have seen me as a good role model.”

Although, disclosure is not a positive experience for everyone and does not always result in people receiving the support they need.

“No, it wasn’t a positive thing unfortunately and I didn’t really get that much understanding and genuine support. I think it was almost – I could feel sometimes that – I sort of regretted sometimes being so open and honest because I felt it was almost used against me, so sadly not a positive situation.”

Some autistic people reported that they feel they must disclose repeatedly to new colleagues or in different situations. It can be helpful to make a record of needs and preferences which can be shared, with permission (see Appendix 5: Wellbeing Passport). This information belongs to the individual and it remains their choice who it can be shared with.

Respect privacy and only share information about an individual’s identity or diagnosis with their express permission.

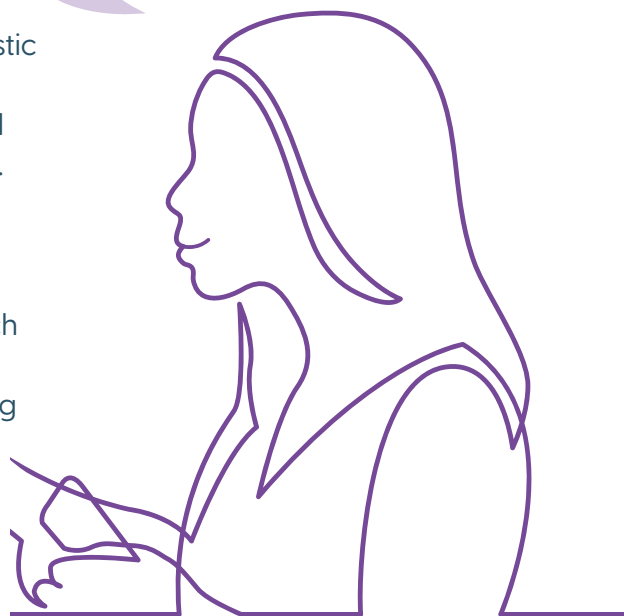
“What helps me stay in the job? People who remember I’m autistic. In my experience that’s like 1% of people in every scenario, I have to remind people that this is a thing for me. When I do that, the change is made for a month, then it goes back. Not having ongoing support makes it challenging.”

Neurodivergence

Masking

“I’m pretty bloody good at just pretending to be like everybody else.”

Where people do not feel comfortable sharing their autistic or neurodivergent identity, they may engage in masking which means they suppress their autistic traits or pretend to be non-autistic or neurotypical (Raymaker et al., 2020). This can include covering up or suppressing natural and actual internal feelings, preferences, and reactions to sensory, communication and social experiences. People mask to avoid stigma, discrimination or harassment which can be linked with autism and other neurodivergence. Masking may serve a necessary purpose but can be tiring and stressful and has been linked with mental ill-health.



“I didn’t really understand what masking meant but there’s something about taking off the mask that’s had a profound effect not only on me and in my work but also in my personal life. Going, yeah, I’m messy sometimes inside as well as out and disorganised and confused [...], I don’t know what’s going on half the time. This is all the messy bits of who I am rather than trying to keep in control and stop people from seeing behind that mask. God that makes me feel quite emotional actually. It’s quite profound, I think.”

It may therefore appear that neurodivergent people are tolerating aspects of the working environment. However, this may be because they are masking and would benefit from adjustments and a more supportive work environment.

More information on autistic masking is available: (see Appendix 1: NAIT guide to autistic masking).

Neurodivergence

Meltdown or shutdown

Neurodivergent people can experience a build-up of stress or anxiety.

“I do have what I now understand to be shutdowns, complete shutdowns, sometimes over the weekend when I have to sort of hide away in my room and have complete time to myself.”

It is important that neurodivergent people can choose to spend breaktimes including lunchtimes, in a quiet area of their choice, to recover or rebalance.

Employees should not be expected to attend social events outside work hours.

Burnout

Characteristics of autistic burnout include chronic exhaustion, loss of skills, and reduced tolerance to stimulus. This situation may occur because of life stressors adding to the cumulative load experienced by autistic adults, coupled with an inability to obtain relief due to barriers to support (Raymaker et al., 2020).

“My mental health really suffered, and I have had a pattern of burnouts as well. I had almost six months I had to stay off work this year, having had a huge – what I now understand to be an autistic burnout. I couldn’t do anything; I could barely answer the door. I think it’s from trying so hard and for masking for so long to try and fit in and try and say and do the right things, but continually getting it wrong.”



What went well?

Stories of success

According to Office for National Statistics data, autistic people, and people with severe or specific learning disabilities, and mental illness have the lowest employment rates. It is estimated that 22% of autistic people are in full-time work, and a further 16% are in part-time work, although 77% of unemployed autistic people want to work (All Party Parliamentary Group on Autism (APPGA), 2019). Although, it is important to note that many autistic employees don't disclose their autistic identity, so actual numbers are unknown. We spoke to autistic people who are employed in the education sector. They described some of the things that they like about their work, and some of the strengths they bring.

"I'm quite lucky in that the school that I work in is a school for autistic learners. Now, I've got to say that I think, I don't want to blow my own trumpet here, but I think I'm probably one of the best people to be teaching in a school like that because I've went through the experience."

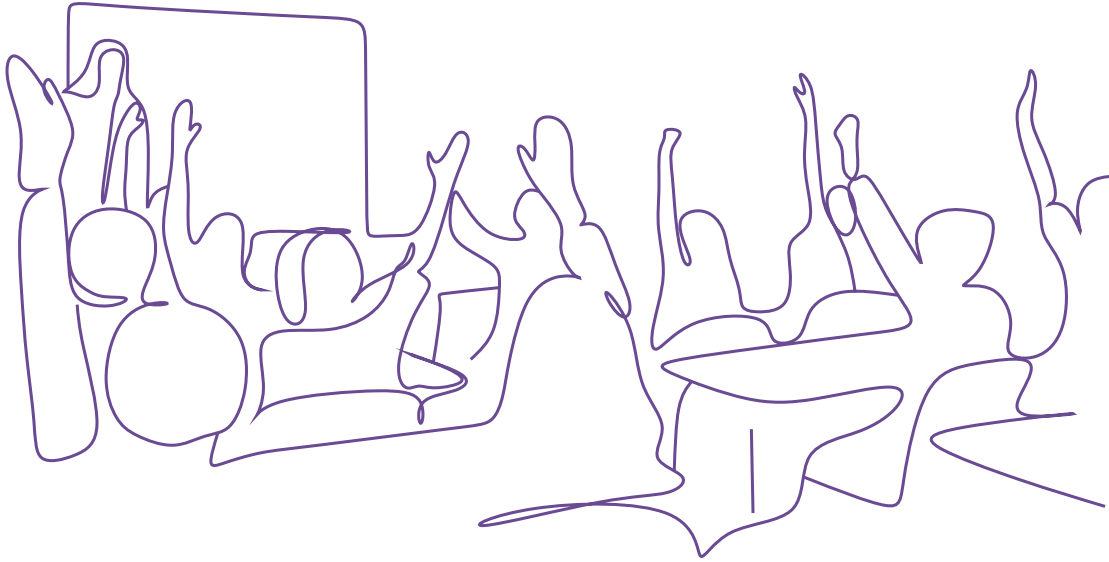
"I have an understanding of the kids that I work with that a lot of people don't have. So, I think if I weren't the way that I am, I wouldn't be as good as I am with the kids. For this area of work, I see it as a positive thing."



"I'm with my people. So, it's not difficult for me to work where I work because I know how they work, and I know how they learn. So, we just focus on having lots of fun and doing the best we can."

What went well? Stories of success

"I think I love my work, it's absolutely brilliant. But that's because of the support I have, and it's because of the people around me. If I was in a school or a department where people were judgy or not caring, I think I'd be miserable when I think or maybe wouldn't be at work."



"I think in these roles, being able to manage my day more and better having a bit more control over the day in myself, working with smaller groups and individuals rather than whole classes. So, it can still be quite intense but it's not as overwhelming as dealing with large numbers. I work with also structured programs. I'm doing structured numeracy and literacy work."

"I'm really lucky because I know a lot of autistic people who are very disorganised, but it's one of my superpowers and special interests."

"Passing on the strategies that I have used to kids is really good because it's a different kind of connection."

What went well? Stories of success

“Doing things that make a difference for pupils, seeing people make progress. I showed a pupil some tech supports for dyslexia two weeks ago, on Word, and then the Immersive Reader in Edge, and she’d gone home and showed her parents, because her dad’s dyslexic as well and has got ADHD, and she came and told me the next day. It had been transformative for all three of them. I was just like yay, this is why we do the job.”

“I love working with people.”

“From an academic point of view, I can get all the qualifications. It’s not a problem. That’s the easy bit.”

“The fact we have a tendency to hyperfocus or educate or hyperfocus on subjects and my hyperfocus happens to be the subject that I teach. So, it’s a massive benefit because I know it and I know it inside out and I know I know it. There’s not a time where I don’t think I know what I’m teaching.”



Creating a neuro-affirming work environment

Neuro-affirming culture can promote healthy working environments. This section provides an overview of aspects of the work environment and culture which can be adapted to support neurodivergent employees.

Recruitment

Offering accommodations during the recruitment process demonstrates to potential employees that your workplace is neuro-affirming and inclusive. People may be reluctant to request accommodations as they are unfamiliar with your organisation at this point and may be concerned that such a request will have a detrimental impact upon their application.

“I’ve had a lot of bad experiences with interviews and because of that I’ve not actually applied for anymore.”

Accommodations that may be useful include:

- **Consider practical evaluations and other alternatives to face-to-face interviews.**
- **Provide the candidate with information about the format of the interview, details of who will be in attendance, and the expected duration.**
- **Provide interview questions in advance, and in written format during a face-to-face interview, or in the chat during an online interview.**
- **Minimise the number of people involved in the interview panel.**
- **Offer alternative meeting formats e.g., online or in person.**
- **Ask the candidate if there are any other accommodations, they would find helpful.**
- **Provide details of anticipated post-interview contact including expected timescales.**

Creating a neuro-affirming work environment

Training for employers and colleagues

Knowledge about differences between people can promote understanding, awareness, and appreciation of colleagues.

Listening to and learning from neurodivergent people can help improve employment experiences for everyone. People should be prepared to learn about neuro-affirming workplaces and reflect on how they can contribute to improving their work culture and environment. This should include recognising stigma and discrimination and how they can challenge this.

All employees should engage in training which provides examples of lived experiences of autistic and other neurodivergent people. Be careful that training doesn't promote problematic stereotypes. Increased knowledge about autism can assist staff to deal constructively with colleagues (and learners/families/partners) who may be experiencing difficulty, and to be able to recognise issues with their own mental health at an earlier stage.

When managers have prior knowledge of autism, disclosure is more often a positive experience for autistic employees.

Additionally, managers should have a core understanding of how to:

- **Respond to disclosure -**

- Offer discussion regarding accommodations,
- Ensure supports are put in place, and regularly reviewed,
- Seek to understand the preferences of the individual regarding sharing of personal information with other people within the workplace,
- Provide information regarding any required processes including legal protections for disabled employees,
- Provide regular evaluations of adjustments including feedback from the employee on their effectiveness.



Creating a neuro-affirming work environment

- **Give clear instructions -**

- Understand communication preferences of the individual and endeavour to comply with these,
- Offer information in a variety of formats.

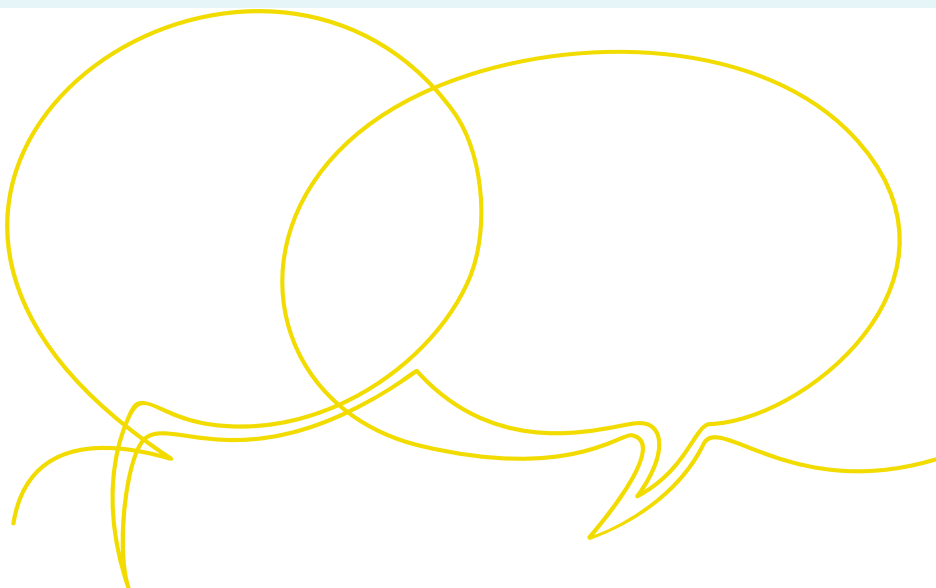
- **Introduce change sensitively.**

Communication

Be clear and direct in your communication.

“It can be quite hard building relations and that, but also understanding people’s humour and sarcasm. That’s not always something that I pick up on.”

- **Ask employees about their communication preferences, and any adjustments they would find helpful and seek to put these in place wherever possible.**
- **Documents and information should be clear, and available in multiple formats.**
- **Be aware that people may need additional time to respond, or to make decisions.**
- **Recognise and understand ‘the double empathy’ problem and take shared responsibility for communication success or breakdown (Milton, 2012).**



Creating a neuro-affirming work environment

Adopt inclusive language

Do not use language that reinforces stereotypes or derogatory terms; patronises or trivialises people, excludes certain groups of people, causes discomfort or offence, or groups together all people within a certain category.

Ascertain the preferred language of the individual. Once you are aware of an individual's preferred language, use this respectfully.

"She and I just probably struggle with each other a bit because she likes to have very vague communication that's very uncertain and flexible, and I'm like, oh, what did you mean?"

Expressing communication preferences

A traffic light system can be used to reflect communication preferences (see Table 1). This table can be adapted to suit individual preferences and different circumstances. Individuals can use coloured stickers to indicate their communication preferences. A sticker of the appropriate colour can be displayed on their name badge or desk name plate, and this can be changed to reflect the person's current needs.

Table 1 - Traffic light system

White	I can regulate my own interactions
Green	I would like to contribute but find it hard to initiate this, please ask me questions
Yellow	I am currently nonverbal but would like to participate. Please help me to communicate in ways that I feel comfortable.
Red	Please do not initiate any interaction with me

Meetings can be made more inclusive when held virtually, and subtitles or captions can be used. Everyone in the meeting can use the chat function to indicate their colour/ communication preference at the start of the meeting (Table 1). People may also choose to use the chat function to express their views rather than speaking. It is the choice of the individual whether they have their camera switched on or off.

Creating a neuro-affirming work environment

Individual expression

“My interaction with colleagues is not great. That can leave me feeling very down mood-wise.”

Accept different expressions of sensory and communication preferences in employees as different but not wrong. Some people may prefer not to make direct eye contact or may use unconventional body language. Feeling free to stim (e.g., fidgeting, pacing, or chewing a pencil), or comfortable to show tics (including eye blinking, throat clearing) can help people to feel well regulated and to manage stress and anxiety.

“You just feel like everyone gets it and you don’t.”

Try not to make assumptions about shared knowledge and understanding of social expectation at work. A mentor, or friend can be useful in assisting interpretation of social situations.

“The only time I have struggled in work is, office etiquette I didn’t realise was a thing, nobody ever told me so I would go and get myself a cup of tea and not ask. I’d come home and say to my partner, and she was like, right, we need to sit down, and this is actually how an office works. Like if you’re making tea, you ask if everyone wants tea.”

Whilst this may increase understanding it should not be used as a means of pressuring an autistic person into giving up their quiet break time, or participating in activities in which they don’t want to be involved.

Creating a neuro-affirming work environment

Physical environment

Many aspects of the typical work environment can prevent employees from performing at their best. Environmental adaptations can improve the working environment. Employees should be consulted prior to making changes and given the opportunity to respond.

“Nobody likes big fluorescent overhead lights. Nobody likes rooms where the blinds don’t work, so at four o’clock in the afternoon everybody’s blinded by the sun that comes through.”

Common issues to consider include:

- **Lighting:** Bright lights can be distracting and contribute to sensory overload. Consider use of blinds or screens, dimmable lighting, alternative sources of light e.g., desk lamps, sunglasses.

“Having a quiet, calm space for an autistic person to go and sit in I think is not too much to ask for any workplace.”

- **Noise:** Consider offering quiet workspace, or quiet office times, headphones or earplugs, and quiet areas for break time.

“I tend to go into school much earlier than what I legally or contractually need to, because it’s lovely and quiet. I can just batter on with things uninhibited by other people getting in the way.”



Creating a neuro-affirming work environment

- **Predictability:** Consider allocating a work area within a hotdesking office, with storage for personal items. Limit reorganisation of storage or environment. Restrict last minute timetable changes. Be aware of how much unpredictability goes on in your workplace and ways that things can be made as predictable as possible.

“A few months back they reordered all the stacking systems, reorganised, which probably would affect anyone. But even to this point, I still months down the line, can’t quite get my head round that change, which has then put up a bit of a barrier because it slows down my work performance.”

“Non-bookable hot desks, so you just roll up, and if and when there was a free space, that would be yours. I hated it. Absolutely hated it, I would be driving to work, and my stress level would be going up and up and up, what if there’s no desk, who am I going to be sitting next to.”

- **Staff Identification:** Some neurodivergent people find it difficult to identify faces and recall names. This can be supported by using photo name badges, adding headshot photographs to email accounts, and having staff photo boards within departments.

“I’d like everybody to wear their name badges and everybody’s name badge to be on the front, so I could see what their name was, that’s what I would change. I need to know everybody’s name.”

Support or mentoring

“It’s about how you bring out the best in people.”

Employees should be encouraged and assisted to build a network of support. A network, or assistance or ‘support circle’ is a range of people and organisations which can be approached to help an individual with issues affecting their work.

Creating a neuro-affirming work environment

“Maybe having people that you can turn to who are aware of autism or could just literally – you feel safe to chat about your issues because maybe sometimes if you’re in a department, people can blab and before you know it, discretion’s out of the window.”

In addition to support provided by HR and line managers, employees may appreciate a mentor or buddy who can be accessed on a more informal basis and can act like a ‘sounding board’ or ‘interpreter.’

“I mean having a manager who looks out for you, I think that’s a big part of it for me I don’t notice if I’m getting a bit – I get into situations here I’m running about daft, doing three or four things at once and I need somebody sometimes just to say, you know what, stop, focus on what you’re doing.”

Employee resource groups – voluntary, employee led groups who aim to foster a diverse workplace aligned with the organisations they serve. They are normally led by employees who share a characteristic.

“Have at least one person who is recognised as somebody who the autistic person could go to, to just seek assistance, basically.”

Social events

Whilst all employees should be included in plans for work social events they should not be expected or required to attend social events outside working hours.

- **Provide advance information on the format of events.**
- **Consider preferences of attendees (including food choices, availability of quiet space, seating plan).**
- **Provide advance information of any contribution that may be expected from attendees.**

Reasonable adjustments

This is a legal term which is used in the Equality Act 2010 which details employers' duties to make reasonable adjustments (adjustments which would be made by any reasonable employer) for people who are disabled. This does not prevent employers from making additional accommodations which may benefit employees.

Where an employee has shared their identity or diagnosis with their employer, they are protected by the Equality Act 2010 in issues relating to their disability. The act states that people with a disability should be treated equally and fairly in the workplace and should not be discriminated against on the grounds of their disability. It also means that the employer should make reasonable adjustments to help disabled people at work.

Examples of reasonable adjustments can include reducing hours of work, job sharing, phased return to work, allocation of duties to colleagues, additional training or retraining and acquiring or modifying equipment.

"I told the management team from the outset that I was autistic after I'd been offered the job. I'm not sure what I expected to happen, but nothing happened. It was never brought up again."

- **Neurodivergent employees should receive information on the availability of reasonable accommodations and other workplace adaptations at the earliest opportunity. This may be during the recruitment process.**
- **After being appointed to a work role, or when a person confirms they identify (or have been diagnosed) as neurodivergent, managers should schedule a conversation with the person about their preferences and needs, and how these can best be accommodated within the work environment. There is no solution that works for everybody, and adjustments should be tailored to individual needs. Adjustments which support people at work will reduce anxiety and stress thereby promoting mental health.**

"Stop treating people as if they're all the same, because one size doesn't fit all."

Reasonable adjustments

Tailoring adjustments

People may be unaware of which accommodations will be helpful to them, and their needs may vary from time to time. In this case, it may be useful to structure a conversation around adjustments that have helped other people. Table 2 provides examples of areas in which some autistic people have benefitted from accommodations. This is not a comprehensive list and flexibility is key to creating a workspace and culture which best fits the needs and preferences within each work environment. There is also evidence that flexibility and accommodations may benefit all employees (Davies et al., 2022).

This table can be used to structure a conversation to identify preferences and needs of employees and potentially supportive adjustments (see Appendix 2: Talking to a neurodivergent employee regarding workplace adjustments).

Table 2 - Suggested adjustments for environment

Sensory Needs	Possible adjustments
Sight	• Turn off or turn down artificial lights
	• Remove flickering or oscillating environmental features
	• Avoid highly stimulating décor
	• Use of sunglasses
Sound	• Consider environmental sounds
	• Reduce auditory clutter
	• Avoid conversations in noisy environments
	• Use noise-cancelling headphones and/or ear plugs
Smell	• Avoid wearing perfume, highly scented cosmetics, or toiletries
	• Avoid aerosols or chemical air fresheners
	• Avoid highly scented cleaning products
	• Consider ventilation, open windows where possible.
Taste	• Respect preferences when preparing for events
	• Don't pressure colleagues into sharing foods (e.g., birthday cake)
	• Review canteen provisions to ensure choice
Touch	• Ascertain tactile preferences
	• Avoid casual touch
	• Explore acceptable sensory-friendly clothing/ uniform choices
Temperature	• Consider environmental temperature
	• Adjust temperature where required
	• Consider use of fans, open windows

Reasonable adjustments

Table 2 - Suggested adjustments for environment

Sensory Needs	Possible adjustments
Proprioception	· Understand the need for proprioceptive input (chewing gum, stress ball)
	· Avoid making inferences from unusual body posture
Interoception and Pain	· Pay attention to verbal reports of discomfort including illness, hunger, and thirst
	· Be aware that non-verbal expression of discomfort may be different from expected
Predictability	· Give realistic information in advance
	· Ensure clear and accurate directional signage in physical space
	· Provide photographs or videos of the physical environment and staff
	· Allow working in a familiar environment
	· Use timetables and adhere to any agreed workplan
Acceptance	· A neuro-affirming approach is beneficial
	· Understand autistic stimming and monotropic thinking patterns
	· Facilitate need for detailed information
	· Seek to understand distress
Communication	· Understand autistic verbal and non-verbal communication differences
	· Know that communication ability is reduced by anxiety and sensory stress
	· Clear unambiguous communication required
	· Avoid phone-based communication, provide options where possible e.g., face-to-face, or online meeting.
	· Promote use of augmentative and alternative communication
Empathy	· Recognise that autistic people feel empathy but may display it differently
	· Empathy towards autistic people may be more difficult for non-autistic people
Physical Space	· Expect a need for increased personal space
	· Avoid proximity to other people where possible
Processing Space	· Allow increased time to respond to questions
	· Allow increased time for decision making
Emotional Space	· Expect differences in emotional expression
	· Allow restorative solitude to recover if distressed
	· Plan regular work breaks and annual leave

Adapted from: (Doherty et al., 2023)

Reasonable adjustments

There is research evidence that people find it difficult to request adjustments and employers should therefore promote their availability and provide them with information about adjustments (see Appendix 3: Information on reasonable adjustments for a neurodivergent employee). Employees may benefit from additional support during this process. Support may be available from union representatives, supportive colleagues, peer networks, or other employees with similar needs.

“I suppose I might be less likely to go looking for the support if it wasn’t part of a natural audit process because I wouldn’t want to bother people. I think that’s a confidence thing. I wouldn’t want to bother someone.”

Being flexible around working arrangements can offer benefits to neurodivergent employees, and other employees who may be unaware that they are neurodivergent or are unable/unwilling to share their neurodivergent identity.

“More flexible working.”

Other resources for information on reasonable adjustments include:
<https://neurodivergentemabler.com/resources.php>

Maintaining and reviewing adjustments

“All adaptations for autistic people in the workplace are for people who are new. There’s never a ‘what would you like and what can we do to support you at this point?’”

Managers should provide a formal letter which summarises the meeting, outlines the agreed adjustments, states who is responsible for them, and confirms when and where the adjustments will be reviewed.

A letter template is available (see Appendix 4: Reasonable adjustment confirmation letter).

Reasonable adjustments

A form such as a disability or ability passport (see Appendix 5: Wellbeing Passport) can be used to record details of required adjustments, which can be helpful. These forms can be used by students on placement, volunteers, or anyone within the workplace to convey their own preferences and needs. The content of these forms should be reviewed and updated on a regular basis. Copies of the passport can be shared with permission from the individual concerned.

“Think carefully about what structures and documents are provided because some people will take them literally, whereas others loosely. I think that’s the case in schools is that there’s a lot of documentation about how things should be done, and it’s not followed. That’s really frustrating for me because they’ve written it down and it’s not done like that. Or possibly even worse, they’ve written it down in a way that doesn’t make sense and then everyone insists it does make sense and I don’t see it.”

Examples are available online:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-adjustment-passport>

<https://www.rcn.org.uk/Get-Help/Member-support-services/Peer-support-services/Health-Ability-Passport>

Where an adjustment requires other people to do something such as providing an agenda in advance of a meeting, someone other than the person requiring the adjustment should be responsible for ensuring that this occurs. This should be agreed, and the arrangement formalised in writing.

“They agreed to the double screen set-up for me, but they never provided me with any cables or docking station so I can’t plug my double screens into my laptop. I’ve mentioned this six times to my manager over a three-month period and they’ve still not done anything about it.”

Agreed adjustments must be maintained even if it appears that they are no longer required. Regular reviews should be undertaken to ensure that agreed adjustments are still in place and that they still meet the persons’ needs.

Reasonable adjustments

Co-production

It is important to make sure that the policies and procedures your organisation follows are fair and respectful of your workforce. Ensure that these are co-produced with representative groups, including neurodivergent employees, and are agreed to be fit for purpose.

“Maybe it would help for workplaces to actually listen to – oh I don’t know – I say if they were to listen to autistic employees actually talk about their experience of work.”

Complaints

Be careful not to assume that the autistic employee is in the wrong, or that any problem that arises is related to their autism.

“Why do I need training on that subject? Is it your perceptions of me and what I’m doing and how I work? Which might actually, if you understand a bit more about that, you understand that I don’t lack skills in that, it’s more about your appreciation of how I do things in that context of doing whatever it is.”

Employees need to know that any complaint or concern that they have will be investigated and dealt with fairly.

“That manager was horrific, absolutely horrific. Her communication skills were very poor. She had absolutely no understanding of autism, no interest in understanding me.”

Seek support at an early stage. In addition to HR or management within your organisation, support may be available from unions, professional bodies, or ACAS (Helpline telephone number: 0300 123 1100).

Reporting disability discrimination

Discrimination applies to all 'protected characteristics' including disability.

- Direct discrimination.
- Indirect discrimination.
- Harassment.
- Victimisation.
- Discrimination arising from disability.
- Failure to make reasonable adjustments.

More information about each of these is available here:

<https://www.acas.org.uk/disability-discrimination>

If you believe there is a situation within your workplace which suggests discrimination is occurring, we recommend seeking support at the earliest opportunity.

ACAS helpline: 0300 123 1100

- Human resources.
- Management.
- Unions.
- Professional bodies.

When adjustments are not enough

Sometimes, despite everyone's best efforts it is not possible for a person to continue in their current role.

<https://www.acas.org.uk/supporting-disabled-people/capability-and-performance-when-someone-is-disabled>

This can be a challenging time for everyone involved, and support should be made available. Organisations which may provide support and assistance include professional bodies, peer networks, unions and other third sector organisations.

Help can include:

- Counselling.
- Peer support.

<https://www.rcn.org.uk/get-help/member-support-services/peer-support-services>

<https://www.bma.org.uk/about-us/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/edi/bma-dln-network>

- Careers advice.
- Financial wellbeing.

Unfair dismissal

If you believe that an employee has been ordered to leave their job without good reason, or where proper procedure has not been followed, this may be a case of unfair dismissal. Unfair dismissal is unlawful and can be challenged by the employee in court or tribunal.

The employee may want to speak to their trade union to get legal advice.

<https://www.equalityadvisoryservice.com>

Conclusion

We hope that this guide provides information which will help to increase knowledge and understanding of neurodiversity and will assist in improving inclusion and diversity in the workplace.

Implementing small practical changes, as described throughout this guide, can provide support to neurodivergent employees. Creating an inclusive workplace culture has been shown to have a positive effect on the mental wellbeing of employees.

Appendix 1: NAIT guide to autistic masking

Introduction

The following is a short summary about autistic masking, written in partnership with autistic people, for professionals to increase awareness of this phenomenon and to signpost to further reading for those who wish to know more. It can be helpful for people involved in diagnostic assessment and those around autistic people day to day, to understand why it happens, how tiring it can be, and to create environments which are accepting of differences in a way that individuals can feel safer being themselves.

In the undiagnosed, masking can lead to the possibility that diagnosis is missed. Even if the need for diagnostic assessment is recognised, masking means that professionals need to look beyond the words people say or initial impressions.

What is autistic masking?

- Autistic masking involves covering up or suppressing natural and actual internal feelings, preferences, and reactions to sensory, communication and social experiences, also referred to as ‘autistic traits’.
- It is a coping strategy for many individuals.
- Sometimes this is a deliberate decision but often, particularly in younger people, it is unconscious or not deliberate.
- It can serve a necessary purpose but is also immensely tiring and comes at a cost to mental health and wellbeing.
- This is a particular phenomenon in autistic people because they live in a world where they don’t have the ‘predominant neurotype’, and which is not always accepting of diversity and difference.
- Masking can help individuals avoid feeling as though they stand out and they might adopt behaviours and responses observed in the ‘neuromajority’.
- Nearly 75% of autistic people (male and female) surveyed, report masking all or some of the time to avoid being perceived as visibly autistic.

Why does autistic masking happen?

Masking tends to happen as a coping or self-preservation strategy, and as a kind of ‘stigma management’ individuals use to avoid being judged negatively for being themselves, and to prevent discrimination and harassment.

What might we notice if someone is masking?

The conversation partner or observer is often unaware that someone is masking. It's possible that individuals mask most or all of the time in some contexts and you may only know them with this demeanour.

When we know someone well, they might tell us about things they do, or we might notice them using a range of strategies, tactics, and processes:

- A rehearsed repertoire of social responses, to greetings, questions, conversations, or overtures others make.
- Forced or copied smiles, eye contact, gestures, expressions.
- Hiding, minimising, or diverting others from topics of interest they think they are perceived to get too focussed on and/ or engaging in activities and conversations that are not of interest to them but known to be/ thought to be preferred amongst other people.
- Stopping themselves from 'stimming' or self-stimulatory actions. Stimming is a positive regulation strategy for many autistic people, but they worry that it will be perceived as weird or unacceptable around other people. Some individuals might use more subtle versions or just not have access to this self-regulation support. Examples of stimming include using preferred repetitive movements or noises, such as hand flapping, rocking, or humming.
- Going with the flow so as not to stand out and resisting own needs and preferences.
- Hiding reactions to sensory experiences which are painful or distressing.
- Relying on others to talk and make decisions in a group.
- Attempting to control all aspects of a social situation to create a greater sense of predictability.
- Copying other people's words, actions, accent and non-verbal communication from real life or from TV or popular culture.

Is masking a good thing or a bad thing?

Masking can feel like a necessary strategy in the short term, for example individuals might use it to:

- Avoid negative attention, stigma or bullying.
- Feel like they fit in and are included in a friendship group.
- Feel accepted.
- Succeed in social settings of school, the community or work.
- For personal safety to avoid harassment.

Some autistic individuals have told us that masking is an essential coping strategy with positive outcomes, however for many it is not a positive outcome, and it comes at an extremely high cost.

One autistic person told us, *“I find a lot of triage-type questions or profiling questionnaires do a poor job accounting for this as they assume the respondent is able to be 100% truthful. The CAT-Q is a notable exception to this.”*

Regular masking can have a negative impact on mental health and wellbeing because it requires ‘relentless vigilance’ (Fede & Laurent).

It can limit access to appropriate physical and mental health care. Regular masking can have a negative impact on mental health and wellbeing because it requires ‘relentless vigilance’ and impacts self-esteem and self-identity (Fede & Laurent).

An autistic person has told us, *“I often find myself instinctively wanting to please professionals by under reporting the severity of pain, illness, or distress.”*

How can masking affect mental health and wellbeing?

It is widely understood that masking can increase stress and impact negatively on mental health and wellbeing.

- Increased stress and anxiety
- Exhaustion because masking takes so much effort
- Autistic meltdowns or burnout when this all gets too much
- Feeling like a fake or that you’re not true to yourself
- Feeling isolated
- Low mood or depression
- High rate of self-harm
- Increased risk of suicide

What about Camouflaging?

The term camouflaging is often used to mean the same things as masking, although Laura Hull and colleagues, describe three subcategories of camouflaging in their assessment tool ‘Camouflaging Autistic Traits Questionnaire’ or (CAT-Q), suitable for people over the age of 16 years. The three subcategories are:

- **Compensation:** Strategies used to actively compensate for difficulties in social situations. **Examples:** copying body language and facial expressions, learning social cues from movies and books
- **Masking:** Strategies used to hide autistic characteristics or portray a non-autistic persona. **Examples:** adjusting face and body to appear confident and/or relaxed, forcing eye contact
- **Assimilation:** Strategies used to try to fit in with others in social situations. **Examples:** Putting on an act, avoiding or forcing interactions with others

What supports might be helpful?

The most helpful support is based on good understanding of the individual, how autism affects them and relevant adaptations in everyday naturally occurring environments. Support provided should be anticipatory, rather than reactive, individualised and relevant to the context people are in. The following may be helpful but not all will be relevant for all people at all life stages.

Safe supportive environment

- Provide a social environment which is supportive, understanding and accepting of difference, so that autistic individuals don't rely so much on masking as a coping strategy. This largely involves the people around them reflecting on their own actions, communication, and mindsets.
- Listen to words people use but also notice, observe, and reflect.
- Normalise conversations about social differences and social expectations.
- Listen and provide information and support to siblings and the wider family.

Recognise moments of challenge

- Understand that asking people directly what helps can feel challenging.
- Be prepared to adapt when individuals are tired, frustrated or overwhelmed.
- Be accepting that sometimes someone is 'just not up to it'. Listen to and notice what is difficult.

Building self-awareness of what works

- Provide a range of opportunities with trusted people, to explore what aspects of different environments are preferred.
- Show individuals their experiences are respected, and they can expect to be heard.
- Understand that individuals might have strong ideas about what will help, and others will not know what might help and need developmentally appropriate information and experiences to build this awareness. We need to listen to words people use but also notice, observe, and reflect.
- Teach and accept the value of stimming. Provide spaces which encourage autistic people to stim freely, without judgment or stigma.
- Be aware that people may have had negative messages about stimming or other regulating activities and been told not to do them. They may need to be explicitly offered opportunities to use familiar regulation strategies when we see it might be useful, e.g.

"Why don't you try rocking?"

- An autistic partner told us, *“When the environment around us allows us to stim freely, it invites us to try out new stims, maybe we’ll find a new stim that helps us regulate – that can only be a great thing!”*

- Support awareness of the individual and those around them of their self-regulation strategies and how particular engagement with others supports mutual regulation.

Understanding neurotype

- Understand difficulties initiating. Don’t wait for people to tell you there is a problem. Check in and offer safe opportunities to express needs and preferences.
- Understanding communication preferences, sensory preferences and thinking styles.
- Understand the benefits of predictability, e.g. doing things when you say you’ll do them, setting clear expectations and providing advanced warning of changes to expectations if possible.
- Take an anticipatory approach. Think about adaptations to everyday contexts (e.g. home, school, work and leisure) which support the participation of autistic individuals.
- Where possible, make unwritten rules explicit.
- Create an environment where it is understood that everyone has needs and other autistic people use masking too.
- Be aware that it may not be helpful to tell people that you think they are masking. Conversations about masking should be handled carefully and respectfully, following an individual’s lead.

Pursue desirable interests and activities

- Enable individuals to pursue desirable interests and activities by making time and transportation (if needed) available. These may be idiosyncratic.
- Family members, partners, friends, and professionals can help individuals by encouraging them to focus on and enjoy their special interests.
- Show support by engaging with individuals and asking them about their interests, enjoying those interests with them, or validating their interests in other ways.
- Support people to spend time with people with shared interests.

- An autistic partner told us, *“Having a visible box of fidget toys is something I find helpful, it’s a cue that this person/environment is safe to be myself”.*

Schedule downtime

- Encourage autistic individuals to prioritise downtime and ask them what they need you to do to reduce the demands on them. Some individuals may not yet be able to tell you. Ask people who know them well or observe what they seek.
- Family members, partners, and friends can help their autistic loved ones by encouraging them to focus on and enjoy their special interests.
- Show support by engaging with autistic family members or friends, by asking them about their interests, enjoying those interests with them, or validating their interests in other ways.

Personal stories:

We asked some autistic partners about their experience of masking.

Personal story 1

“My relationship with masking is a complicated one. Being diagnosed with autism in adulthood, for me, meant that I had been masking for a very long time and didn’t know it. It’s something we are encouraged to do, even though we are not overtly told to do it. Certain behaviours are encouraged, and others discouraged. Now, I find myself masking, particularly at work, sometimes I am aware of it and intentionally masking, other times I am not. I know that it’s exhausting, completely exhausting. When I get home, I am often too tired to do anything, cook, answer the phone, reply to a friend’s text message. Even watching a new TV show or a new episode of a familiar TV show is too much, I’ll re-watch an episode I’ve seen before, possibly hundreds of times before! I’ll go to bed early. As a one-off, this might be something we all do, it’s manageable, but for me, and many other autistic people this is a regular occurrence. That’s where the problem lies, because we’re no longer living, there’s no energy left for that.

What we’re doing is surviving, I got through the day because of masking but at a huge cost. It might seem like a helpful solution, but it’s just a patch. The real problem is that we live in a world which is not always accepting of diversity and difference, and that’s what needs to change. I mask for you, not for me. I mask so my family know I love them, so my friends know I care about them, so I can be taken seriously at work. I mask to avoid prejudice and discrimination.

Ultimately, if I were asked to stop and take down my ‘mask’, I couldn’t do it, I use it so frequently I don’t know where my mask ends, and I begin.”

Personal story 2

Another autistic partner told us that masking is sub-conscious, occasionally useful, very tiring, and often deeply ingrained in the psyche of a person.

“The realisation I was masking came a few years after my autism diagnosis in early adulthood. I had been using various techniques all throughout my life with the general intention to blend into the background and just be like everyone else. Sometimes this masking would allow me to thrive in social environments such as school or the workplace, but it would always come at a cost hidden to all others. I was exhausted and often depressed, I’d come home from school with only the energy to be alone and often I’d have to have a nap – no one outside of my home knew the toll it would take.

I’m now over 10 years past my diagnosis, and I am more comfortable with who I am and what works well for me, yet I cannot stop masking. I have stimming behaviours which I’ve suppressed, I utilise carefully practiced conversations, and often remain unable to keep up with all the demands of life due to exhaustion.”

Useful links and references

<https://autismawarenesscentre.com/what-is-autistic-masking/>

<https://neuroclastic.com/masking-and-mental-health-implications/> (Fede and Laurent)

Listen to a personal experience about masking by Immie

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Appendix 2: Talking to a neurodivergent employee regarding workplace adjustments

This document is intended to guide managers/supervisors through a conversation with a neurodivergent employee regarding workplace adjustments which may support them in their work. It can be amended to suit individual circumstances. Also available as a fillable form.

This document may also be used as a template for recording the details of the conversation.

Table 1 - Meeting details

Date	Present	Role

This document, and the information it contains should only be shared as agreed by the employee. It is confidential.

Share this document with the employee prior to the meeting to allow them plenty of time to consider their responses.

Introduction

- Explain to the employee that the purpose of this conversation is to identify aspects of the workplace and their work role which may be adjusted to accommodate their neurodivergence.
- Be aware that if they are new to a role, they may not yet know whether adjustments are needed and what they are. Reassure them that you can re-visit the discussion.
- Reassure the employee regarding the confidentiality of information shared during this meeting. Information will only be shared with their express permission.
- The employee does not need to disclose any information, but if they are able to share details of their experience you may be in a better position to assist.

1. Can you describe your support needs, and what might be challenging in the workplace?

2. Have you had support previously, in a former job or at school or college/university?

- What did you receive support with?
- What helped?

3. Have Occupational Health (or other party) made any recommendations for workplace adjustments?

4. Can you describe how your thinking, communication and sensory style could be better supported at work?

5. Do you need any changes to the place that you (would) work in? (consider lighting, noise, smell, temperature, taste, touch, and physical space; see Table 2 in this document for suggestions of adjustments)

Table 2 - Suggested adjustments for environment

	Possible adjustments	Identified adjustments
Light	• Turn off or turn down artificial lights	
	• Remove flickering or oscillating environmental features	
	• Avoid highly stimulating décor	
	• Use of sunglasses	
Noise	• Consider environmental sounds, reduce background noise	
	• Avoid having conversations in noisy environments	
	• Use noise-cancelling headphones and/or ear plugs	
Smell	• Colleagues avoid wearing perfume, highly scented cosmetics, or toiletries	
	• Avoid aerosols or chemical air fresheners	
	• Avoid highly scented cleaning products	
	• Consider ventilation, open windows where possible	
Temperature	• Consider environmental temperature	
	• Adjust temperature where required	
	• Consider use of fans, open windows	
Taste	• Respect preferences when preparing for events	
	• Don't pressure colleagues into sharing foods (e.g., birthday cake)	
	• Review catering provisions to ensure choice	
Touch	• Ascertain tactile preferences	
	• Avoid casual touch	
	• Explore acceptable sensory-friendly clothing/ uniform choices	
Physical Space	• Expect a need for increased personal space	
	• Avoid proximity to other people where possible	

6. Are there aspects of this job that you find, or think you might find difficult without adjustment? (consider communication, routine/predictability, processing differences; refer to Table 3 for suggestions of adjustments).

Table 3 - Suggested adjustments for work role

	It would be helpful if other people at work:	Identified adjustments
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand my verbal and non-verbal communication styles and preferences 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Know that my communication ability is reduced by anxiety and sensory stress 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are aware that there are situations where communication is difficult 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use clear unambiguous communication with me 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support avoidance of phone-based communication; provide other options where possible e.g., face-to-face, or online meeting 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support my use of augmentative and alternative communication 	
Predictability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give realistic information in advance 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure clear and accurate directional signage in physical space 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide photographs or videos of the physical environment and staff 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow working in a familiar environment 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use timetables and adhere to any agreed workplan 	
Processing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow me increased time to respond to questions 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow me increased time for decision making 	

7. Are there aspects of workplace culture or acceptance which you find challenging or which you feel could be improved? Do you have any information you would like to share which may assist colleagues to understand your needs?

Table 4 - Acceptance and Culture

	It would be helpful if other people at work:	Identified adjustments
Proprioception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand the need for proprioceptive input (chewing gum, stress ball) 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoid making inferences from unexpected or unusual body posture 	
Interception and Pain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pay attention to verbal reports of discomfort including illness, hunger, and thirst 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be aware that discomfort can be expressed in a range of ways; verbally and non-verbally 	
Acceptance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take a neuro-affirming approach 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand neurodivergent stimming and monotropic thinking patterns 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate any need for detailed information 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seek to understand distress 	
Empathy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognise that neurodivergent people feel empathy but may display it differently 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognise that empathy towards neurodivergent people may be more difficult for neurotypical people 	
Emotional Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expect emotions to be expressed in a range of ways 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow restorative solitude to recover if distressed 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan regular work breaks and annual leave 	

Adapted from: (Doherty et al., 2023).

Next steps:

Make a formal note of any agreed adjustments, together with details of who will be responsible for making the adjustments. The employee should receive support to make adjustments rather than being required to enact changes alone. A review date should be entered for when it is anticipated that adjustments will be made. Further review dates should then be agreed to ensure that adjustments are maintained and to discuss additional requirements.

Table 5 - Agreed Adjustments

Agreed adjustment	Responsibility	Review date

Actions:

Note if there is an agreement regarding information to be shared with other workplace employees.

Signed: **Date:**

Employee

Signed: **Date:**

Manager / Supervisor

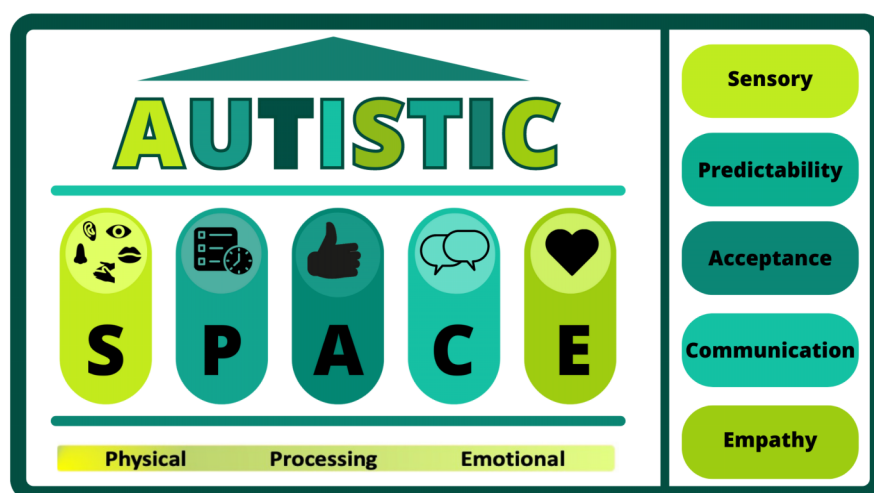
Date for next Review Conversation:

Appendix 3: Information on reasonable adjustments for a neurodivergent employee

Neurodivergent employees can use this information to guide their consideration of adjustments which may support them at work.

Reasonable adjustments for a new team member

Conversation prompts using the SPACE Framework



This is a document to support shared understanding and shared expectations about adaptations in the workplace that may be desirable for a neurodivergent employee. There may be some adjustments that are essential, some that are required only when stress levels are higher and some that are preferences, but you don't feel so strongly about them.

- You might find all of these are relevant.
- There might be some that you don't feel apply to you and that's fine too.
- The adjustments you need might not be included here and it's fine to raise other needs or preferences.
- You might wish to discuss this with friends and family.
- It may change over time and your workplace adjustments should be reviewed regularly.

If you would like to write down your responses or any questions you may have, there is space at the end of this document for this.

1. Disclosure

You are not obliged to disclose a disability or identity. You may wish to share some aspects of your disability or neurodivergence but not others. Your preferences can change over time, and we can revisit this discussion.

- Please let us know whether there are diagnoses or ways that you identify that you wish to share with HR and the senior leadership team.
- What are your preferences in terms of disclosing to other members of the team and people outside the team?

Are there any other things you'd like to raise in relation to disclosure?

2. Sensory

Consider your workspace including break rooms, meeting rooms and office space.

Are there any adjustments that would help. Some examples are:

- Wearing headphones or sunglasses.
- A 'visual' I can use to indicate if I am open to speaking right now or not.
- An option to go to a quiet space or work in a different space when I need to

Are there any other sensory adjustments or preferences you'd like to raise that it would be helpful for colleagues to know about in the work environment, in relation to light, smells, food, touch, movement, seating or spaces?

3. Predictability

- How long in advance do you like to know what you'll do each working day?
- How much detail do you like in your work plan (from others/ plans you make yourself)?
- Do you prefer breaks at specific times/ or with a specific frequency?
- How important is it to know the start and end time of meetings?
- Do you like to be notified of changes in advance and when an unexpected change is afoot – how do you prefer this is communicated?
- If your expectations are disrupted, what are the things you might need to feel regulated (time alone, time to talk it through when I'm ready, a break from tasks, something else?)

Are there any other adjustments or preferences you'd like to raise that it would be helpful for colleagues to know about in the work environment, in relation to predictability?

4. Acceptance

Are there things you are aware of that help you feel accepted or which at times make you feel less accepted?

- A workplace where we expect and welcome diversity.
- Knowing that stimming is expected and accepted in the workplace.
- Being given opportunities to share what is working well or not well for me.
- Neuro-affirming language and conversations in the office.
- Not feeling you must mask but can be your authentic self in social and work interactions.

Are there any other adjustments or preferences you'd like to raise that it would be helpful for colleagues to know about in the work environment, in relation to acceptance?

5. Communication

Are there aspects of communication where you seek support or adjustment? This can be social aspects of communication, reading, writing, typing, how others communicate with you.

- Do you prefer to communicate verbally, through text/ email, via Teams or phones?
- Are there particular communication styles that are harder for you?
- Do you experience situational mutism?
- Do you have preferences for joining and taking part in online meetings?

Are there any other adjustments or preferences you'd like to raise that it would be helpful for colleagues to know about in the work environment, in relation to acceptance?

6. Empathy

We might all have different communication styles and preferences in the team. We hope to acknowledge that sometimes cross neurotype communication works well and sometimes we have to meet each other half-way.

Are there any other adjustments or preferences you'd like to raise that it would be helpful for colleagues to know about in the work environment, in relation to empathy or double empathy?

Some examples of adjustments are provided below and in these two documents by
https://www.agcas.org.uk/write/MediaUploads/Resources/Disability%20TG/Reasonable_Adjustments_-_Neurodiversity.pdf

<https://neurodivergentmabler.com/resources.php>

Sensory Needs	Possible adjustments
Sight	• Turn off or turn down artificial lights
	• Remove flickering or oscillating environmental features
	• Avoid highly stimulating décor
	• Use of sunglasses
Sound	• Consider environmental sounds
	• Reduce auditory clutter
	• Avoid conversations in noisy environments
	• Use noise-cancelling headphones and/or ear plugs
Smell	• Colleagues avoid wearing perfume, highly scented cosmetics, or toiletries
	• Avoid aerosols or chemical air fresheners
	• Avoid highly scented cleaning products
	• Consider ventilation, open windows where possible.
Taste	• Respect preferences when preparing for events
	• Don't pressure colleagues into sharing foods (e.g., birthday cake)
	• Review canteen provisions to ensure choice
Touch	• Ascertain tactile preferences
	• Avoid casual touch
	• Explore acceptable sensory-friendly clothing/ uniform choices
Temperature	• Consider environmental temperature
	• Adjust temperature where required
	• Use of fans, open windows
Proprioception	• Understand the need for proprioceptive input (chewing gum, stress ball)
	• Avoid making inferences from unusual body posture
Interoception and Pain	• Pay attention to verbal reports of discomfort including illness, hunger, and thirst
	• Be aware that non-verbal expression of discomfort may be different from expected

Predictability	Possible adjustments
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give realistic information in advance • Ensure clear and accurate directional signage in physical space) • Provide photographs or videos of the physical environment and staff • Allow working in a familiar environment • Use timetables and adhere to any agreed workplan
Acceptance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neurodiversity affirming approach is beneficial
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand autistic stimming and monotropic thinking patterns • Facilitate need for detailed information • Seek to understand distress
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand individual verbal and non-verbal communication styles and preferences. • Know that communication ability is reduced by anxiety and sensory stress • Are there particular situations where communication is difficult? • Clear unambiguous communication required • Avoid phone-based communication, provide options where possible e.g., face-to-face, or online meeting • Consider use of augmentative and alternative communication
Empathy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise that neurodivergent people feel empathy but may display it differently
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empathy towards neurodivergent people may be more difficult for neurotypical people
Physical Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expect a need for increased personal space
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid proximity to other people where possible
Processing Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow increased time to respond to questions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow increased time for decision making
Emotional Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expect differences in emotional expression
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow restorative solitude to recover if distressed • Plan regular work breaks and annual leave

Adapted from: (Doherty et al., 2023)

Appendix 4: Reasonable adjustment confirmation letter

A template which may be used by an employer to formally confirm agreed reasonable adjustments to support an employee. This suggested form of words can be replicated as a letter. It can be amended to suit individual circumstances.

Date: Dear (name of employee):

I am writing to confirm your agreed reasonable adjustment request.

We met to discuss your request for reasonable adjustments on [date].....

At the meeting we discussed [provide a summary of the meeting including specific work-related concerns, and adjustments considered].

We have agreed to implement the following reasonable adjustments to support you at work [provide specific details of the adjustments and the how these will support the employee].

It is hoped these adjustments will help you to manage your mental health and meet the needs of [name of organisation].

We have agreed to review the adjustments in [time period] to see how the adjustments are working for you and for [[name of organisation].

We have agreed that this review will take place [give details on how, for example face-to-face with a manager, or by email].

If at any point before the agreed review you or [name of organisation] need to raise a concern about the adjustment or propose changes, we agreed that we will do this by [give details on how this will be raised, for example face-to-face with a line manager, or by email].

Yours sincerely,

.....
[signature and full name of manager/ employer]

Appendix 5: Wellbeing passport

An employee may use this template to share information with colleagues. There is no requirement for the employee to share anything they do not wish to disclose. (Also available as fillable form).

Wellbeing Passport:

Name: Completed on:

This document is confidential, and information contained within should only be shared with the express permission of the person named above.

Do you have information you would like to share which may assist colleagues to understand your personal experience in the workplace including your needs and strengths?

Can you describe your support needs and workplace challenges?

Occupational Health and other third-party recommendations

What reasonable adjustments have been agreed with your manager?

Action	Date/Responsibility	Review Date

Signed (Employee): Print name: Date:

Signed (Employee): Print name: Date:

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