



A TOOLKIT FOR SUPPORTING COLLEAGUES IN TRAINING WITH NEURODIVERSITY CONDITIONS...





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Introduction ●●●

Neurodiversity acknowledges that each person's brain is unique. Our brains work and interpret information differently and we all bring individual experience, strengths, and assets to a situation.

This guidance has been developed to raise awareness of learning disabilities and neurodiverse conditions which will help support doctors in training with neurodiverse conditions whilst undertaking their Speciality Training in a variety of Host organisations.

N.B. these tips have been taken and collated from a number of different sources and are referenced at the end of the booklet.



What is Neurodiversity ●●●

Neurodivergence means having a neurology that differs significantly from typical neurology. It highlights that people naturally think about things differently, process information and learn differently as well.

It is an umbrella term for a set of different skills profiles including dyslexia, dyspraxia, autism, Attention Deficit Disorders (ADD), Tourette syndrome and other conditions. These are 'spectrum' conditions, with a wide range of characteristics, which share some common features in terms of how people learn and process information.

It is estimated that around 1 in 7 people (more than 15% of people in the UK) are neurodivergent.

Neurodiversity can impact a range of mental functions including attention, executive function (planning tasks) sensory processing, learning, sociability, and mood. Society, education systems and workplaces are typically designed in a way that suits neurotypical people. This creates challenges for neurodiverse people whose brains do not function in the same way.

The impact of this can also change over time and some people will often have characteristics of more than one type of neurodiversity.

Most forms of neurodiversity are experienced along a 'spectrum'. For example, the effects of dyspraxia on one person can be different for another person with dyspraxia.



Neurodiversity is not an illness and cannot be changed - with support and adaptations people can develop strategies to manage their neurodiversity. For example, this may include using alarms and reminders to help remember tasks they need to do or wearing headphones or ear defenders to manage sensory overload (becoming overwhelmed by too many senses and sensory stimuli).

There are many positive advantages to be gained by having employees who think differently.

Positive attributes commonly associated with neurodiverse conditions include:



Attention to Detail

- Thoroughness
- Accuracy



Expertise

- In-depth knowledge
- High level of skills



Deep Focus

- Concentration
- Freedom from distraction



Integrity

- Honesty, loyalty
- Commitment



Absorb & Retain Facts

- Excellent long term memory and recall



Creativity

- Distinctive imagination
- Expression of ideas



Neurodiversity Conditions

You cannot (usually) tell that a person is neurodivergent just by looking at them. Neurodivergent conditions are invisible conditions. This can lead to barriers and needs being overlooked.

There are several types of neurodiversity often people may have more than one of these types of neurodiversity or may have other impairments or mental health conditions. For example, neurodiverse people may often also have anxiety and depression. There may be biological explanations for this, but the anxiety can also be associated with the difficulties and trauma of functioning as a neurodiverse person in a 'neurotypical world'.

It's also important to note that although labels can be useful, these can also be restrictive and confusing. Different people will also have various opinions about language, so it is important to check out with someone what they're comfortable with. For example, many autistic people prefer to be referred to as 'autistic people' while some people prefer the term 'people with autism'.

This following is a brief introduction to the types of neurodiversity and these conditions will affect everyone in a different way. It is important to talk to the person to understand how it impacts them.



- **Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).**
- **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).**
- **Asperger's.**
- **Dyslexia.**
- **Dyscalculia.**
- **Dyspraxia – Development Co- Ordination Disorder (DCD).**
- **Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD).**

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)? ●●●

Autism is a lifelong, developmental disability that affects how a person communicates with and relates to other people, and how they experience and make sense of the world around them.

Some autistic individuals will have a diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome however, since 2014, Asperger's has been brought under the broader definition of autism spectrum disorder. Autistic people can have challenges processing social information and can find communication difficult and confusing. For example, they may struggle to read non-verbal communication, sarcasm, metaphors and/or tone of voice. It may also take them a while to process what has been said or they may need to repeat back what others have said to be able to understand it. It is important to communicate clearly and give time needed to process the information, Autistic people can experience a meltdown or shutdown when they are overwhelmed or overstimulated. These look different for every individual but can include loss of behavioural control or going quiet and 'switching off'.



Strengths associated with ASD

- Attention to detail and processes.
- Honest and strong principles.
- Logical working style.
- An ability to 'hyper-focus'.
- In-depth knowledge on topics of interest.
- Good problem-solving skills.

Common challenges associated with ASD

- Difficulty maintaining eye contact.
- Difficulty reading non-verbal cues and understanding 'office politics'.
- Sensory sensitivity/altered sensory perception, which can affect concentration and anxiety.
- Difficulty in dealing with change.
- Increased anxiety, especially in social situations.

Adjustments to be considered include

- Adapting working hours e.g. to allow extra breaks, or to allow staff to travel at quieter times.
- Locating the individual's desk in an area away from the main flow of 'traffic' in the office, in order to reduce distractions.
- Giving clear objective, written instructions on work tasks & timely feedback.
- Providing structure to the working day e.g. a regular timetable of tasks, meetings etc.
- Using dividers between desks or providing noise-cancelling headphones.
- Providing screen filters and/or low desk lighting to reduce glare.
- Avoiding use of 'hot-desking' for autistic staff.
- Arranging brief, regular meetings to check progress on tasks.



Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) ●●●

ADHD is classified as a brain-based disorder characterised by a persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity and impulsivity. Contrary to popular perception, the brains of people with ADHD are under-stimulated, helping to explain these characteristics.

Potential ADHD Strengths

- High energy.
- Hard working.
- Able to distil complex information.
- Problem solving Creativity.
- Communication and rapport Able to hyper focus.

Potential ADHD Challenges

- Lack of attention to detail.
- Difficulty concentrating.
- Making deadlines.
- Not completing tasks.
- Impulsive decision making.
- Organisation Stress and anxiety.
- Overload of verbal instruction.

Adjustments to be considered include

- Give objective, clear, timely feedback.
- Reduce distractions.
- Use bullet point notes.
- Encourage small breaks.
- Ask 'what works well for you?'
- Be clear about priorities.
- Create routine and structure.
- Follow up meetings with emails.
- Utilise assistive technology.



Dyslexia ●●●

Dyslexia is a developmental condition that primarily affects reading, writing and spelling. It can also affect short-term or 'working' memory, processing speed, and the ability to organise thoughts and tasks. These difficulties can cause people to struggle to concentrate in an open plan office, forget verbal instructions and lose track easily in meetings.

It can also be difficult to follow directions and understand instructions which are written down.

People with dyslexia develop various ways to manage their reading and writing. Some people find it easier to write on a computer or to use coloured paper to read from. They may prefer to be given instructions verbally if this is easier to understand and make sense of than written information. If this is the case a reasonable adjustment could be to give information verbally rather than sending an email where possible.

Strengths associated with Dyslexia

- Creativity, originality and inventiveness.
- Strong visual thinking skills.
- Good at problem solving and seeing the 'big picture'.
- Resilience and determination.



Potential challenges associated with Dyslexia

- Difficulty reading quickly and accurately.
- Making spelling errors or missing out information/key words in written documents.
- Slow processing speed.
- Poor organisational skills e.g. prioritising tasks, meeting deadlines.
- Poor short-term working memory.
- Data processing.
- Difficulty in structuring writing.

Adjustments to be considered include

- Use bullet points and ensure text is spaced out well in documents and emails.
- Work with flow charts or diagrams rather than lots of text.
- A paperless office can discriminate as some people work better from a printed documents Highlight key areas of text when sending out key messages.
- Have coloured paper available for printing.
- Choose Arial or Tahoma.
- Use font size 12+.

Dyscalculia ● ● ●

Dyscalculia is a type of specific learning difficulty which impacts the ability to do maths-based and number-based tasks such as simple calculations. It can also impact tasks such as map reading, telling the time, spatial awareness and understanding measurements.

Dyscalculia is under researched compared to dyslexia, although it is more prevalent. It's important to make sure people have enough time to do number-based tasks or they may find it useful to have visual cues to assist with these tasks.



Dyspraxia ●●●

Dyspraxia is a developmental coordination disorder that affects fine and/or gross motor skills, coordination and balance. It may also affect speech.

Adjustments to be considered include

- Give advance notice of tasks whenever possible. In particular, giving out reading materials well in advance of meetings.
- Think about the 'degrees of distraction' around the person's workspace, are they in the middle of a room with 360 or a corner with only 90?
- Wherever possible try to include diagrams, flow charts or pictures within the document.
- Print or copy text on coloured paper (rather than white) or provide a plastic overlay. You can also alter PC preferences to replace white backgrounds with colour.
- Try not to overburden people with verbal distractions. Always offer to write the main points down, tape-record them if possible or send a summary email.
- In written communication, prioritise important tasks first. Bullet pointing, making sure things are well spaced out and highlighting important bits of text.
- Empower colleagues to let you know how they would like to communicate and work.
- Consider positive aspects of dyslexia. Dyslexics are not restricted to prescribed, linear formats and can come up with inventive solutions to old problems.
- Check out specialist assistive technology software for reading and writing (this will require a special referral).



Supporting Neurodiverse Colleagues ●●●

When you become aware that a trainee has a form of neurodiversity (such as autism or dyslexia), you may be unsure about what to do and how best to offer support.

To help provide trainees with the support and guidance they need to perform at their best, prioritise their wellbeing and ensure they are treated fairly if any issues arise, consider the initial steps below:

Everyday actions that will help neurodiverse team members

A manager should be supporting their trainees to ensure their needs are appropriately met at work as this will support their wellbeing as well as enabling them to perform tasks and roles to the best of their ability.

Do's: Things managers can do to achieve this

- Discuss with the trainee what you can do to support them in a private and confidential area.
- Develop an awareness of neurodiversity and the different forms of it.
- Discuss how this specifically impacts them in the workplace.
- Always communicate clearly.
- Be approachable, available and encourage staff to ask any questions or to discuss the barriers they face.
- Build good working relationships by getting to know the trainee.
- Treat each trainee as an individual and identify what they each want and need from a manager.
- Continue to build a good working relationship, where the trainee feels safe and empowered to talk to about any issues they may have.
- Monitor trainees' workloads to ensure they are not overloaded or placed under excessive time-pressures.
- Regularly hold one-to-ones to check on how work is going, identifying upcoming challenges and agree how best to support them.
- Continually reflect on how you can better work with each trainee and provide the support they need.



While these things will benefit all trainees, they can be particularly important for neurodiverse trainees. Supporting trainees also enables any issues to be identified early and for misunderstandings to be resolved before they escalate.

It will also help to foster an environment of openness and tolerance where trainees feel safe and empowered to discuss their requirements in relation to their neurodiversity.

Don'ts: Things for managers to try and avoid

- Don't assume that a trainee is neurodiverse.
- Don't diagnose a trainee with a form of neurodiversity.
- Don't make assumptions on how a trainees neurodivergence impacts them as conditions impact everyone differently.
- Expect trainees to change their neurodivergence. With the appropriate support they can develop ways to manage this, but neurodiversity is part of an individual's neurological make up.

If there are performance or behavioural concerns, you should offer the trainee the opportunity to explain reasons behind the issue (as their neurodiversity may be related to this) before considering whether to escalate this matter further to Lead Employer HR Advisory team.

If you are unsure, please contact the Lead Employer HR Advisory team for further advice and guidance.



Supporting a trainee to discuss their Neurodiverse ●●●

It can be difficult and stressful for trainees to talk about their neurodivergence - there is still a general lack of awareness, so they may worry about being treated differently or unfairly.

How to encourage a positive conversation

- Have the conversation in a private space, where you will not be disturbed (if not already somewhere appropriate).
- Explain the reason for the conversation.
- Allow the trainee as much time as they need.
- Listen attentively and be open minded.
- Keep the meeting as informal and relaxed as possible.
- Be sensitive and calm.
- Ask the trainee if they have thought about what support might help make clear what you will do next.
- Suggest a further meeting to discuss what support could be provided.

During the conversation

- Ask simple, open, and non-judgmental questions.
- Avoid metaphors – if you use them make sure to lay them out clearly as these can be confusing for some neurodiverse people.
- Listen carefully, be patient and don't make assumptions.
- It can be helpful if you repeat back what they have said to check your understanding of it. This helps to clear up any misunderstandings quickly and reduce the frustration for the trainee of feeling like they can't get their point across.
- Provide reassurance where necessary.
- Discuss current strengths and how these can be utilised.
- Discuss any difficulties and how these can be mitigated.
- Discuss adjustments and additional support that might help.
- Consider whether to highlight examples of workplace adjustments implemented for other employees.
- Adjourn for a break if needed.
- Seek further support or guidance from Lead Employer HR team.



At the end of the conversation

- Review and clarify what has been discussed.
- Check if they want to discuss anything else.
- Agree actions moving forward.
- Keep a note of what was discussed and agreed.
- Highlight additional sources of support within the organisation including neurodiverse buddies, support networks etc.

After the conversation

- Provide any support as agreed and monitor the situation.
- Consider whether further opinions are required from Lead Employer HR Advisory team, Health Education England, Health, Work and Wellbeing (HWWB).
- Be available and approachable in case the trainee wants to talk to you again.

Remember:

you are not expected to be an expert on any form of neurodiversity. However, if you become aware of a trainee's neurodiversity, try to learn more about it, this will help you provide more appropriate and beneficial support.

There is a lot of information available online, try to ensure you access this from well referenced sources. The trainee is the expert in how their neurodivergence impacts them, so it is important to find out what it means to them and not make any assumptions.

Talking to a trainee may highlight some adjustments that could help them, a manager should also consider seeking further help and guidance from:

- Lead Employer HR Advisory team or with Health Education England (HEE)



Consider the wider working team ●●●

Neurodiverse trainees may find parts of their role trickier than neurotypical trainees usually do. Equally they may find other parts easier and quicker to complete than others.

It can be helpful if the rest of the team know that a colleague is neurodivergent, and what they can do to support them. If the person is happy for the rest of the team to know they're neurodivergent it's important to know:

- How they want to tell people (if they want to talk to their colleagues themselves or for you to share the information on their behalf).
- What they do and don't want their colleagues to know.

Managers **must not** tell other staff about an trainee's neurodivergence without their agreement.

Raising awareness within the team

A manager can help the rest of the team understand more about neurodiversity by:

- Arranging meetings and/or training sessions.
- Providing information and/or fact sheets.
- Make sure you access information from reliable, evidence-based sources as there is a lot of misinformation and stereotypes about neurodiversity.
- Organising training or encouraging staff to attend training that is offered.

Raising awareness can help other staff to understand and respect the needs of their neurodiverse colleagues which can improve teamwork and overall wellbeing.



Organising tasks within the team

To best work with and support neurodiverse trainee, some flexibility in the tasks carried out within their team can be beneficial. A manager should organise the work of their team to ensure that:

- Workloads are manageable, timeframes are realistic, and staff have the support they need.
- Difficulties are minimised or additional support provided.
- Strengths are identified and utilised.
- Each team member has a variety of duties and feels motivated to perform at their best.

[Click here to see Appendix 1 on supporting Neurodiversity within the clinical setting.](#)

Handling issues or problems fairly ●●●

If a manager is aware a trainee is neurodiverse, it should be easier to provide the support they need to complete the roles and responsibilities of their job.

On some occasions, even with adjustments in place, a trainee's performance or conduct may warrant further review. Many issues are best resolved by having an informal conversation with the trainee. Sorting things out at an early stage can stop problems becoming serious and remove the need to make a formal complaint.

Where the matter cannot be resolved informally, a manager should contact:

- Lead Employer HR Advisory team or with Health Education England (HEE)



Making reasonable adjustment ●●●

The Equality Act 2010 assists and protects a disabled person in employment or seeking work. Not all neurodivergent people will consider themselves disabled, but neurodivergent conditions are likely to meet the legal definition of disability under the Act.

The Equality Act defines disability as: a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on an employee's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

- The duty to make reasonable adjustments as set out in section 20 of the Equality Act, operates differently depending on the sector, so, for example, employers and service providers must comply with all three duties; there is no duty on those who let premises to remove or alter a physical feature.
- The anticipatory duty is applicable to services, public functions, associations and education. This means that those with responsibility under the Act, have to be positive, and proactive, thinking about the barriers faced by disabled people. They must plan and put into place a range of adjustments a disabled person can use to access the service, when they need to.
- Further information can be found in our Reasonable adjustment passport guidance found [here](#)



Access to work ●●●

Access to Work (AtW) is a government-run programme that supports people with a health condition or disability.

It provides individual practical support and advice to help to overcome barriers at work.

It helps people with all types of disabilities, including Mental Health conditions.

Access to Work grants may help with additional costs beyond “Reasonable Adjustments”

What could Access to Work pay for?

- Special equipment or adaptations.
- A support worker or job coach to help in the workplace.
- Disability awareness training for colleagues.
- The cost of moving equipment following a change in location/job.
- Travel support to work for those who cannot use public transport or drive which may include taxis.
- An Access to Work Mental Health Support Service for people who are absent from work or experiencing difficulties with their wellbeing.

Please contact Lead Employer HR Advisory team for further information regarding Access to Work OR visit the below website:

Access to work:

[Get Support if you have a disability or health condition – WWW.GOV.UK](http://WWW.GOV.UK)



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Appendix 1

Supporting Neurodiversity Conditions within a clinical setting

The transition to a new placement can be overwhelming for some trainee doctors and can cause a great deal of anxiety.

The below guidance is suggested things to consider when you have a trainee on placement within your Host Organisation.

Communications

- Give both verbal and written instructions where possible.
- Highlight salient points in a document.
- Provide information on off-white or pastel coloured paper.



- Allow time for reading information and time for this to be processed (handovers/tutorials).
- Use flow charts and idea maps where possible.
- Use pod casts and other recoded options.
- Use Ariel or Sans Serif font, size 12 or whatever is comfortable.
- Use two coloured pens when writing on a flip chart/whiteboard.

Instructions

- Try to give instructions one at a time and no more than 3 at a time.
- Keep instructions simple and concise.
- Demonstrate more complex tasks.
- Encourage the person to repeat the instructions back to you.
- Write down the plan of action as well as verbalise it.
- Where multiple instructions cannot be avoided, use idea mapping, diagrams or numbered bullet points.
- Do not hint or imply or make assumptions.



Time and Work planning

- Ensure minimum rest breaks when working on the computer.
- Seek/provide a workspace where there are few distractions.
- Encourage use of wall planners, diaries, outlook, mobile phones as prompts alarms to remind them of meetings and deadlines.
- Create daily, dated to do lists and build planning into each day.
- Contingency planning (allowing time and having a backup plan for unforeseen occurrences).

Organisation

- Keep work areas neat and tidy – a place for everything and everything in its place.
- Colour code items.
- Use numeric or date filing systems instead of alphabetic.
- Provide details of how to get from place to place (especially when travelling to somewhere for the first time).



Written work

- Change background colour of screen to enhance readability.
- Assign a colleague as a proof-reader.

Reading

- Highlight, embolden, or box important text in documents.
- Use bullet point format where possible.
- Provide a summary/overview for long documents.

Lunch times, break times, social events

- The lack of structure and routine may be difficult for them to deal with.
- Some people may struggle with the fast processing of social interaction.
- People who are sensitive to noise may struggle with noise levels.
- Some people may feel anxious and overwhelmed when dealing with unpredictable situations
- Some people may have difficulty initiating friendships which could lead to them feeling isolated.



Avoid Jargon & complicated language

e.g. can it be simplified to make it more accessible, for

example:

Amended	Changed
Annually	Each year
Compiled	Put together
Cost effective	Good value for money
Collaboration	partnership
Culmination	Completion
Delegate	Give
Financially viable	Possible within the money we have
Preceding	Previous
Subsequent	Next
Substantial	Large, big
Remuneration	Pay



The Clinical Environment

For people with sensory sensitivities, GP practices and hospital environments may at times be overwhelming, for example:

- People talking.
- Doors opening and closing.
- Tannoy announcements and intercom systems.
- Babies crying.
- Equipment and machinery.
- Phones ringing.
- Ambulances arriving / leaving.
- Heating and ventilation systems.
- Antiseptic, cleaning supplies, creams & lotions.
- Urine, stools and drainage from wounds.
- Waste disposal rooms.
- Medication.
- Canteens and coffee shops.



- Hospital wards.
- Perfume, odours, laundry powder.
- Overcrowded notice boards and displays.
- Television screens with information for patients.
- Vibrant colours throughout the environment.
- Fluorescent and harsh lighting.
- Patterned carpets, curtains and blinds.
- Flashing lights outside rooms to indicate that a nurse or doctor is required.
- Moving lines on an electrocardiogram and other equipment.

Workplace Culture

Encourage disability awareness training and appreciate why organisation-wide training on Dyslexia / Neurodivergent conditions is essential for a