

# Neurodiversity guide

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# What is Neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity refers to the different ways the brain can work and interpret information. It highlights that people naturally think about things differently. We have different interests and motivations, and are naturally better at some things and poorer at others.

Most people are **neurotypical**, meaning that the brain functions and processes information in the way society expects.

However it is estimated that around 1 in 7 people (more than 15% of people in the UK) are neurodivergent, meaning that the brain functions, learns and processes information differently. Neurodivergence includes Attention Deficit Disorders, Autism, Dyslexia and Dyspraxia.

This guide will give you some tips and strategies for supporting **neurodivergent** employees in the workplace.



## **Dyslexia, DCD, Dyscalculia, Dysgraphia**

*Applied neurodiversity*

- born with condition
- relates to applied, educational skills such as reading or motor control
- not considered a health condition



## **Mental health condition**

*Acquired neurodiversity*

- develops in response to a health condition
- could return to 'neurotypical' if health condition improves



## **Neurological illness or brain injury**

*Acquired neurodiversity*

- develops in response to a health condition
- potentially resolves as injury heals or worsens as health deteriorates



## **Tourette Syndrome, Autism and ADHD**

*Clinical neurodiversity*

- born with condition
- relates to applied, educational skills such as reading or motor control
- not considered a health condition



## Potential Dyslexic Strengths

- ▶ 3D Visual Thinking
- ▶ Connecting ideas and noticing patterns
- ▶ Problem solving
- ▶ Creativity
- ▶ Communication and rapport
- ▶ Big picture thinking



## Potential Dyslexic Challenges

- ▶ Spelling
- ▶ Reading emails
- ▶ Reading reports
- ▶ Creating long documents
- ▶ Sequencing content in documents
- ▶ Time management
- ▶ Concentration
- ▶ Overload of verbal instructions
- ▶ Data processing



## Organisational level strategies

- ▶ 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+



## TOP TIPS FOR WORKING WITH PEOPLE WITH DYSLEXIA

1. Give advance notice of tasks whenever possible. In particular, giving out reading materials well in advance of meetings.
2. 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?
3. Wherever possible try to include diagrams, flow charts or pictures within the document.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. In written communication, prioritise important tasks first. Bullet pointing, making sure things are well spaced out and highlighting important bits of text.
7. Empower colleagues to let you know how they would like to communicate and work.
8. Consider positive aspects of dyslexia. Dyslexics are not restricted to prescribed, linear formats and can come up with inventive solutions to old problems.
9. Check out specialist assistive technology software for reading and writing (this will require a special referral).



## Potential Mental Health Strengths

- ▶ Creativity
- ▶ Deep thinking and rumination
- ▶ High startle reflex (very alert)
- ▶ Empathy
- ▶ Visual talents
- ▶ Verbal talents



## Potential Mental Health Challenges

- ▶ Withdrawal from communication
- ▶ Uncharacteristic phrases
- ▶ Less tolerant with colleagues
- ▶ Conflict with colleagues/customers
- ▶ Difficulty taking feedback
- ▶ More sensitive to pressure
- ▶ Sensory sensitivity
- ▶ Priority management
- ▶ Meeting overwhelm
- ▶ Memory and concentration



## Organisational level strategies

- ▶ Sign the time to change pledge and develop an action plan that includes transforming the capabilities of line managers to support wellbeing
- ▶ Set specific goals related to improving the capacity of your line managers to promote wellbeing
- ▶ Develop robust governance and reporting arrangements to ensure your strategy and goals are implemented and monitored
- ▶ Consider solutions to overcoming challenges around workplace wellbeing
- ▶ Take steps to prevent unhealthy working habits such as sending emails during the weekend or late at night
- ▶ Encourage employees to talk with colleagues rather than relying on email
- ▶ Positive interventions such as restricted meeting length and better encouragement for employees to plan regular time away from their desks.



## Mental Health Conditions

### Generalised Anxiety Disorder

- ▶ Ongoing sense of worry 6 months+ without specific object of fear

### Panic Disorder

- ▶ Repeated, unexpected attacks of intense fear
- ▶ Palpitations, tremors, choking

### Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

- ▶ Following a traumatic event
- ▶ Nightmares, flashbacks, hyper vigilance

### Depression

- ▶ Energy and mood swings yet more often lows, desire is there yet ability is removed

### Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

- ▶ Thoughts or behaviours seeming impossible to control

### Bi Polar

- ▶ Severe energy and mood swings from hyper to low activity/self efficacy, can be self harm



## Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

### What is CFS?

- ▶ Severe and debilitating fatigue
- ▶ Pain, poor memory, poor concentration, depression
- ▶ Interferes with daily activities - not relieved by bed rest

### Who is affected?

- ▶ Approximately 250,000 people in Britain
- ▶ All types and of all ages - 4 times more women than men, less likely in young people
- ▶ Most frequent onset 40-69 age group

### Prognosis and long term view for employment

- ▶ Not known cure, usually about managing the symptom
- ▶ Many never fully recover
- ▶ Less than 50% are able to return to work, over 50% on benefits or sick leave, less than 20% can work full time



## Potential CFS Challenges

- ▶ Tends to be cyclical - so when feeling well can 'over do it'
- ▶ No clear cause of CFS - lack of understanding
- ▶ Infections can make it worse
- ▶ Prolonged activity can cause a relapse
- ▶ Need for frequent breaks
- ▶ Poor memory and concentration
- ▶ Stress and anxiety
- ▶ Dizziness or weakness
- ▶ Possible depression



## Organisational level strategies

- ▶ 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 a routine and structure
- ▶ Follow up meetings with emails
- ▶ Utilise assistive technology (this will require a special referral)



## 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



## Organisational level strategies

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## Resources

- ▶ <https://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/>
- ▶ <https://www.geniuswithin.co.uk/>
- ▶ <https://archive.acas.org.uk/neurodiversity>
- ▶ <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/diversity/neurodiversity-work>
- ▶ <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work>