Workplace adjustments for neurodiverse colleagues.

The aim behind making workplace adjustments is to enable all employees to perform at their best. This can be achieved by removing as many barriers as possible so that everyone can start from the same position. Where barriers cannot be removed to ensure equality, individuals should be given the adjustments they require to reach an equal footing as their non-neurodivergent colleagues. These personalised adjustments are sometimes known as equity.

Making adjustments for existing employees.

Be prepared for adjustment requests

Make sure that you're familiar with your organisation's adjustments policy. Talk to your HR and Diversity and Inclusion teams (D&I) to ensure you understand what to do if one of your team members requests an adjustment from you.

Workplace adjustments can be a sensitive topic to discuss – but it is vital that you don't shy away from it.

Requests for adjustments.

You will most likely get requests for adjustments from existing members of staff who have been working without adjustments. It's important that your team members know they can talk to you about their work needs and ask you for changes to how they work.

A 'medical' report is not required for the purposes of making adjustments. Some people may provide an executive summary, which contains general recommendations, if they have been provided with one. These are not specific to the role; for that, a personalised workplace assessment will be required.

Use your regular one-to-one catch-ups to ask your team members how they're finding their work and working environment. This includes reviewing tailored adjustment plans, if they are used. Start holding regular meetings if you don't already.

Be proactive.

It's also your job to monitor how your employees are handling their work and to see if they need any support, including adjustments. For example, an employee might think they're doing fine, but you might notice they're having to work longer than expected, or that their work isn't of the quality you'd expect.

An employee may not realise that they have a disability, or they may not know what adjustments they need. First, talk to them about their work and, if necessary, speak to HR about organising an assessment or obtaining expert advice.

If an employee who is struggling with their work refuses to consider adjustments, you may need to look at performance management.

Your organisation's workplace adjustment procedure.

It's important that you're familiar with your organisation's workplace adjustment procedure to know what to do when you have to make adjustments. Make sure you follow it and ask for help from HR and D&I experts if you need it.

Tell your team member what the process is. This will help set their expectations about what to expect. For example, if it will take a certain amount of time before the adjustment can be arranged, be honest about that.

Neurodiversity – What is 'reasonable'?

You have a legal responsibility to make all reasonable adjustments. There are several factors to consider when deciding what's reasonable, and you must consider all of them together.

Some of them will be more or less significant than others, depending on the nature of your organisation, your team and the adjustment. You should consider the following:

Cost of the adjustments

Most adjustments are fairly inexpensive – in fact, research in the US has found the majority of adjustments pay for themselves. Even when a cost involved, funding may be available, for example through the government's Access to Work programme.

Consider the cost of the adjustment in relation to the organisation's resources as a whole. Generally, the more resources the organisation has, the more reasonable an adjustment is.

Practicability of the adjustments.

An adjustment must be practicable to be reasonable. An adjustment can be practicable if it doesn't detract from a core component of the role.

It can help to distinguish between processes and outcomes. If an adjustment means the process changes, but the outcomes remain the same, then it will likely be practicable. You could also allow a slight reduction in output levels, but not in the quality of outputs.

It can also be reasonable to transfer your employee to a suitable, alternative, vacant position. Remember, you have a legal duty to make an adjustment if it is reasonable.

Effectiveness of the adjustment.

Does the adjustment remove or significantly reduce the barrier? If it doesn't, it is not effective. To be reasonable, an adjustment must be effective.

It's important to remember that an individual may not be an expert in their own condition. This can be especially true for neurodiversity, where individuals may not have a formal diagnosis or even be aware that they are neurodivergent.

If they don't know of an adjustment that would be effective, ask if they'll accept advice from HR and D&I experts, and experts in their condition.

Disruption to the business.

This is the extent to which the adjustment would disrupt the functioning of the organisation. Most adjustments do not disrupt the business significantly. If the adjustment only affects how an individual works and not their outputs, then it is unlikely to disrupt the organisation.

Consider whether it would be more disruptive not to make the adjustment. Would the business be more disrupted by their inability to perform their role fully because the adjustment was not made?

Effect of adjustments on others.

Some adjustments for one employee will have an impact on other employees. For example, if the adjustment gives the employee flexible hours, will that affect the ability of the people they work with to perform their roles?

Some people may be resentful of their colleagues' adjustments. It's important that all your team members know that you are a fair manager and that fairness can mean treating people differently. Make sure everyone in your team knows their needs are all equally important to you.

Health and safety risks.

Most adjustments are not genuine health and safety risks. However, it is your job to assess health and safety risks for all your staff, and an adjustment will never be reasonable if it poses an unacceptable health and safety risk.

Make sure you're assessing risks accurately before refusing a request for an adjustment on health and safety grounds. Collect all the facts and don't base your decision on assumptions.

You must conduct a risk assessment if you are worried about health and safety risks. This could involve talking to an Occupational Health advisor, an HR manager, your manager, and other relevant experts such as IT or facilities managers and health and safety officers.

Length of service and valuable skills, contacts or training.

An adjustment may be more reasonable if, by not making it, you would lose a long-serving employee. They will likely have useful organisational knowledge and experience.

They may also have been trained in vital skills or have valuable contacts that you don't want to lose. Consider the impact that not making an adjustment would have and whether the cost of losing a long-serving employee – with valuable skills, knowledge and contacts, an employee into whom you may have invested time and money in training – is outweighed by the cost of making the adjustment.

External sources of help

It's a good idea to look at the help you can get when deciding whether an adjustment is reasonable. You should talk to:

- Your manager
- HR
- Occupational Health
- Equality and D&I professionals.

You can also talk to relevant neurodiversity charities, such as:

- National Autistic Society
- British Dyslexia Association
- Dyspraxia Foundation
- ADHD Foundation
- Access to Work

Common adjustments for neurodivergent colleagues.

Adjustments – Memory

Short-term working memory is a common challenge for many neurodivergent individuals. An individual with typical short-term working memory can hold and process more pieces of information than someone who struggles with it.

How can memory affect a person's work?

It can impact work in many ways including:

- Learning new skills and information
- Copying down information may take longer or contain mistakes
- Notes from meetings or conversations may miss information or contain mistakes
- May find it harder to follow instructions and directions – some steps may be missing or in the wrong order
- Difficulty remembering information shared verbally – such as instructions and numbers
- Difficulty following processes in the correct order or missing steps in the process
- Forgetting where they are in completing a task.

Common workplace adjustments for memory

Adjustments are not 'one-size-fits-all' – they must be suitable for the individual, their role and the organisation.

Some common adjustments for employees whose condition affects their memory include:

- Giving the person extra time to make notes they can refer back to
- Managers holding more regular catch-up and follow-up meetings to remind the employee what they need to do.
- Communicating in simpler formats, such as bullet points, checklists and flow charts. Use plain English. This can make it easier to remember information and refer back to it.

- Allowing the employee to use their phone while working – for example, to set reminders, make notes or record conversations.
- Encourage the use of calendars, planners and project management tools that show deadlines. Some people prefer paper planners, calendars and task lists as they can keep them visible on their desks avoiding the ‘out of sight, out of mind’ scenario.
- Encourage the use of digital reminders for meetings and deadlines.
- Keep questions and instructions short if given verbally.
- Use images, colours and other features which can help use other senses to remember information.

Key points.

Each individual is as unique as their neurodiversity experience. They will need systems, strategies and adjustments to suit these.

There is no one-size-fits all solution. Bespoke systems using a variety of evolving strategies usually work best.

You may need to factor in time for the employee to get used to working with any adjustments before evaluating how well they are working. This is especially true for people whose condition affects their memory, as they may take longer to get used to working with new processes and tools.

Adjustments – Organisation, planning and time management

Organisation, planning and time management can often be more challenging for neurodivergent individuals. This is especially true for those who are ‘big picture thinkers’ who see how each piece of a project connects to multiple others, giving a diverse view rather than a more linear one.

Potential impact on work

Some people don’t have an intuitive sense of time. For example, judging how long a task is likely to take or being able to estimate how long five minutes is.

Individuals who find organisation, planning and time management challenging may be reluctant to spend extra time working on these skills. They may believe they need to spend the time they have ‘catching up’ due to lack of time. Many also feel guilty about scheduling time to plan and organise in their diaries.

Common workplace adjustments for organisation, planning and time management

Adjustments are not ‘one-size-fits-all’ – they must be suitable for the individual, their role and the organisation.

Some common adjustments for employees whose condition affects organisation, planning and time management include:

- Giving people windows of time to arrive and leave (for example between 8.45am and 9.15am) if this is reasonable in their role.
- Provide a workspace that lets people put up reminders and other visual cues about their work.
- Allowing them to carry devices that have reminders – such as a smart phone.
- Moving office clocks or providing larger clocks so they’re easier for people to see.
- Assistive technology, such as software that helps with time management. Calendars now have the option of giving reminders of upcoming meetings which can be very helpful.
- Setting time aside from their regular duties to set up a reference log of how long specific tasks take. These can then be referred to when planning. For example, timing how long it takes to switch off devices, pack them, and travel to another building for a regular meeting.
- Encouraging the use of digital or paper planners. It may be that the individual prefers to set up their own bespoke formats for these to fit their needs rather than fit into a pre-designed system.
- Setting aside time away from their regular duties at the beginning and end of every day for organisation and planning. It can also be helpful to schedule more time every month to plan ahead, and review and reset systems and strategies.
- Schedule regular ‘admin’ time into diaries.
- Project management systems can often be very helpful such as Gantt charts and kanban boards. Software such as Trello or Microsoft Planner can help.
- Colour coding, deadline reminders and visual layouts can be very useful.
- Breaking projects and tasks into small step-by-step pieces can help prioritise work and calculate timings. Brainstorming, mind maps and similar can be useful for this.

Key points

Each individual is as unique as their neurodiversity experience. They will need systems, strategies and adjustments to suit these.

There is no one-size-fits all solution. Bespoke systems using a variety of evolving strategies usually work best.

Time management, organisation and planning training can be very useful for many people. However, they often do not fully meet the needs of neurodiverse individuals due to the complexity, diversity of neurodiversity, and the flexibility needed to overcome any barriers.

Adjustments – Reading, writing and numeracy.

Difficulties with reading, writing and numeracy are often associated with dyslexia but they can frequently be experienced by anyone who is neurodivergent.

General adjustments.

Adjustments are not ‘one-size-fits-all’ – they must be suitable for the individual, their role and the organisation.

Some common adjustments for employees whose condition affects reading, writing and numeracy include:

- Have a stock of ergonomic pens, keyboards and other writing equipment.
- Purchase licences for common assistive programmes, such as dictation programmes, speech-to-text and text-to-speech. Have these ready to share as soon as an employee asks to use them.
- Encourage individuals to take regular breaks to reduce fatigue and errors.
- Create quiet places for employees to work away from distractions and interruptions.
- Allow employees to turn off work-related notifications (such as emails, calls and texts) for set periods when they need to focus.

Key points

Each individual is as unique as their neurodiversity experience. They will need systems, strategies and adjustments to suit these.

There is no one-size-fits all solution. Bespoke systems using a variety of evolving strategies usually work best.

Many neurodiverse individuals find that their accuracy and speed of processing text and numbers, as well their writing, will vary during the day or working week. Illness, fatigue and stress can all negatively affect these skills.

Conditions affecting reading

Potential impact on work.

- Tasks involving reading may take longer.
- May not read as accurately – for example, missing key words or misunderstanding parts of what they've read.
- They may need to read aloud – this is often slower and can cause significant anxiety.
- Overly literal reading – may not realise language is metaphorical or figurative.
- Some formats may be harder to read – for example, text in smaller fonts, justified paragraphs, or certain coloured paper.

Common adjustments for reading

- Allotting more time for reading tasks.
- Providing a quiet area away from their workstation to work on tasks involving reading.
- Sharing documents in plenty of time ahead of meetings and training to give the individual time to read and process them.
- Sending documents in editable format. They may need to adjust colour, font, size, and spacing to fit their individual needs.
- Providing coloured paper for the individual to read documents from. This makes reading easier for some people (though not everyone).
- Keeping sentences and paragraphs short when sharing text with them (for example, documents and emails). Use bullet points and text boxes for key points. Give plenty white space between paragraphs and bullet points to make them easier to read.
- Highlight key points and actions in a way that suits the individual. This could be in bullet points at the top and bottom of a document, using bold text for key passages, or something else.
- Providing easy-read formats of key forms and documents.
- Encouraging all employees to write in plain English where possible.
- Using in-built accessibility checkers before publishing documents.
- Sharing complex information with images – for example, flow charts and bar charts.
- Communicating in recorded messages – such as voice notes – instead of texts and emails.

Conditions affecting writing.

Potential impact on work.

- Tasks involving handwriting may take longer.
- Their handwriting may be messier.

- Writing may contain errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation.
- Writing may not be structured logically – sentences, paragraphs and sections may appear out of order.

Common adjustments for writing.

- Providing assistive software such as text-to-speech.
- Training on in-built accessibility tools such as spell checks, bespoke dictionaries, and homophone checkers (similar sounding words).
- Allowing the use of IT and assistive software for taking written notes in training and meetings.
- Allow recording of meetings, especially if the individual is taking the minutes.
- Reassigning tasks involving writing to colleagues (if this is reasonable – see advice in ‘Neurodiversity – What is ‘reasonable’?’ above). For example, asking someone else to take minutes of a meeting.
- Follow up meetings and conversations with an email of agreed actions and decisions.
- Creating templates or reference documents with common phrases for written work that can be used for written work.
- Do not penalise spelling or typing errors such as in internal emails or exam papers.

Conditions affecting numeracy.

Potential impact on work.

- May not understand basic mathematical concepts.
- Writing and copying numbers – such as phone or reference numbers – may contain inaccuracies and errors.
- May find it harder to remember passwords containing numbers – especially automatically generated passwords where numbers have no significance to them.
- May find using pin codes, alarm codes and similar codes difficult.
- Spreadsheets and tables may be harder to read and understand.
- Mistakes – such as reversing 14 to 41 – may be harder to notice.

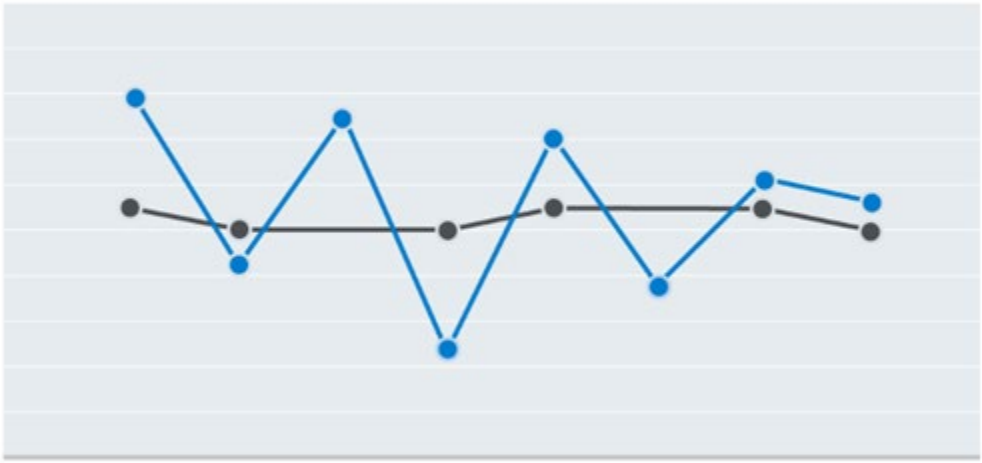
Common adjustments for numeracy.

- Training colleagues on communicating with the individual (with their agreement).
- If giving numbers verbally, say each digit individually (say “one, four” for 14 instead of “14”).

- If possible, put spaces in long lines of numbers such as mobile phone numbers. For example, 07 123 456 789.
- Use images or colours when using numbers in presentations so that they are easier to see and understand.
- Allow assistive software which reads out numbers.
- Set up spreadsheets so that calculations are made automatically.
- Do not ask people to make calculations in their head or on the spot during meetings. Ask them to send the details later if needed.

Adjustments – Concentration.

We all have times when our levels of concentration fluctuate. For neurodivergent people though, this can often be both more extreme and difficult to regulate than for their non-neurodivergent peers. If using the ‘spiky’ profile image, concentration may be spiked both above and below the average range.



Concentration and neurodiversity.

The concentration extremes are often referred to as:

- Hyperfocus – when a person may be so focused (also known as ‘in the zone’) that they are oblivious to what is going on around them

- Hypo focus – when a person finds it very difficult to focus on a task.

In both cases, transitioning into and out of concentration can take longer than average. Concentration can be adversely affected by factors such as:

- Emotions such as worry, stress, excitement and enthusiasm
- Tiredness
- Illness
- External distractions.

Potential impact on work.

- They make take longer to complete tasks.
- They may miss critical information in conversations and meetings, such as decisions and actions.
- They may be more easily distracted from their work by sights and sounds around the workplace.
- Once distracted, they may find returning to what they were doing harder.
- Their work may contain more errors and inaccuracies as they struggle to focus while completing it.
- They may miss deadlines as they take longer to complete tasks.
- They may leave work right up to a deadline as they believe the pressure of a close deadline helps them focus. This may work, but it should be discussed with their manager as it can cause stress and risks missing deadlines.

Common adjustments for concentration.

Adjustments are not ‘one-size-fits-all’ – they must be suitable for the individual, their role and the organisation.

Some common adjustments for employees whose condition affects concentration include:

Workplace

- Encourage your team to work in their preferred ways wherever possible, for example working in quiet locations or from home. Alternatively, some may find that coming into the office more than required helps them concentrate.
- Assigning them a workspace in a quieter area where fewer people are likely to walk past, and away from noisier areas.

Planning and pacing

- Encouraging the employee to schedule different tasks for different times of day. For example, they may find it easier to do writing tasks in the morning, and short-term focus tasks in the afternoon.
- Provide tools to help them pace their work. This can be as simple as an alarm.
- Use calendars to block out time for specific tasks. Ask colleagues and managers to respect those calendar blocks unless absolutely necessary.

Reducing distractions

- Allow employees to use with headphones or ear plugs in to remove background noise distractions.
- Allowing employees to turn off work-related notifications (such as email, phone calls and work chats) for set periods to reduce distractions.
- Allowing the employee to fidget or doodle during meetings, with the understanding that this helps their concentration (though it may look like they are not focusing).

Meetings

- Allowing the employee to take regular short breaks or short walks. This can help with pacing work and processing information.
- Structuring meetings to make them as focused and concise as possible. This includes having the host pause regularly for contributions – as people with barriers around concentration may forget their ideas if they must wait a while to share them.
- Planning the timing of regular meetings to occur just after a break. They may have to concentrate to be on time, and so be unable to perform their usual duties in the run up to a scheduled meeting. Alternatively, they may hyperfocus on their work and miss the start of the meeting. Timing meetings to start just after breaks can help reduce the likelihood of this occurring.
- Build regular breaks into longer meetings – for example, above 45 minutes.
- Allow some meeting attendees to be present only for the part of the meeting that is relevant to their work.

Key points

- Concentration levels vary for everyone but tend to be more extreme and harder to regulate if neurodiverse.
- Many factors can affect a person’s ability to regulate their concentration.
- There is no one-size-fits-all solution and strategies and adjustments will need to be reviewed and changed over time.

Adjustments – Routine and structure.

Changes to regular routines and structures at work can be tough to adjust to for anyone. However, for some neurodivergent people, they can cause unbearable levels of stress and anxiety.

This can be the case for some autistic people who find change to established routines difficult to manage. It can also apply to anyone who has developed reliable coping mechanisms at work, who is now concerned that adjusting to new routines and structure could disrupt these coping mechanisms.

Routine and structure and neurodiversity.

Routine and structure can present barriers for several reasons. Some people may have set routines they rely on, and will struggle to work in any other way. You may think they are being inflexible, but even seemingly minor changes to established routines at work can be very distressing.

For others, inflexible processes and tight deadlines will be a challenge. They might feel very anxious or unable to work with a deadline looming. Rigid working hours and lack of control of their work diary can be a barrier for some people.

Some people work better when they have more autonomy and flexibility. This is especially true for those with inconsistent and fluctuating concentration levels. They can use this to work around neurodiverse characteristics such as procrastination, restlessness, varying energy levels and hyperfocus, for example.

Potential impact on work.

- Changes to established routines can cause some employees stress and anxiety – for example, people with autism.
- Other neurodivergent people may find rigid routines difficult or impossible to work with – for example, people with ADHD.
- Work may be lower quality or take longer if neurodiverse employees must work to routines and structures that don't work for them.
- Employees with conditions that affect memory may forget workplace routines and structures, especially if they are new employees or routines and structures have recently changed.

How to support neurodiverse employees with routine and structure.

Be clear about expectations

- When recruiting, stipulate if the role involves processes that must be followed exactly (such as some audits or safety processes), or if work needs to be flexible and responsive.
- When someone new joins your team, be open and clear about all the routines and structures already in place – formal and informal. Let them know that you're open to suggestions of changes to improve them.
- This may require you to assess the routines and structures that are in place in your team and your organisation. Sometimes, long-established processes can go un-remarked upon because you hardly notice them, if you've been working with them for a long time.

Be flexible

- Let people set their own structures and routines as far as possible. What is reasonable will depend on the role, and there will be some roles for which it isn't reasonable to allow this at all – for example, if the routines and structures are in place for specific health and safety reasons, or audits.
- Equally, there will be some roles where flexibility in routine and structures may be reasonable. In this case, you may have a legal duty to allow disabled employees to adopt alternative routines and structures. This could be if, for example, a routine is established without any reason beyond being 'the way that it's always been done', and it won't have a disproportionate impact on the team and the organisation to change it.

Avoid micromanaging an employee

- Many managers may see micromanagement as a useful tool to ensure that neurodivergent employees meet deadlines and work in a conventional way.
- However, this will often not work for neurodiverse individuals who learn, process and work in different ways to meet their needs and styles. Micromanagement styles often cause neurodivergent employees significant stress and result in a deterioration of work rather than an improvement.

Keep them updated about change

- For example, if the software your employee uses must be updated and is likely to change, ensure this is communicated as early as possible. Show them what is going to change and provide them with extra training if necessary.
- If the software is developed in-house, make sure the needs of all colleagues – including neurodivergent people – are considered by developers.

- If workplace routines are going to change (for example different opening times or shift patterns), make sure these changes are communicated as early as possible. Seemingly minor changes can be very disruptive and create significant barriers for people with well-working and established routines and structures as they are all often finely balanced and interlinked. Changing one thing can have knock-on effects. Early discussion is essential to identify and resolve any potential barriers.

Review regularly

- Check in regularly with your team about how they're finding the team's and the organisation's routines and structures. Make sure they know that you're open to feedback about what is and isn't working for them, and that you'll support them by making whatever changes you can to help them.

Common adjustments for routine and structure.

There's no one-size-fits all solution to barriers arising from routine and structure. Talk to the employee about the barriers they are experiencing and identify adjustments that will help.

You might need to seek expert advice on what's possible and the most effective adjustment, but start by talking to the individual to see if they have ideas about what they might need. Don't make assumptions or impose adjustments that the colleague does not want.

Common adjustments for routine and structure include:

- Allowing the employee to work from home. This can be helpful for some employees but disruptive for others, so talk to them about what they need.
- Flexible working times – for example, allowing them to start and finish work within windows of time, such as between 8:45 and 9:15am. This can help with pacing and preventing burnout.
- Sharing their routine with the rest of the team (if they agree). This can help prevent demands being made on their time outside their working hours, if they differ from the rest of the team's.
- Having alternative routines.

These may not all be reasonable for your organisation or for every role.

Adjustments – Movement and co-ordination.

Some neurodiverse conditions can affect a person's movement and co-ordination. This can include gross motor movements, such as walking and balance. It also includes fine motor skills, such as manual dexterity and handwriting.

A condition that commonly affects movement and co-ordination is dyspraxia. Other neurodiverse conditions can also affect movement and co-ordination. Employees may not be fully aware of how their condition affects them, and may have a condition they're not aware of.

Potential impact on work.

Some people can find it more difficult than others to complete tasks that require fine or gross motor coordination, such as:

- Handwriting
- Typing
- Tasks that require balance (for example using ladders at work)
- Using equipment such as printers and telephones that use small buttons or touch screens
- Standing for a long time
- Personal grooming tasks such as ironing clothes, shaving and doing their makeup
- Driving.

If someone finds some of these tasks difficult, consider whether these tasks are necessary, and if there are other ways to achieve the same goals.

Some people facing these barriers may have faced them all their lives; others may have developed them at a later stage.

What can managers do?

There can be stigma associated with having conditions that affect movement and co-ordination. It's important to train staff to be sensitive to their colleagues' neurodiversity.

There are some steps you can take proactively, such as:

- Having some speech-to-text software ready to use
- Have a stock of ergonomic computer equipment and other workplace equipment
- Awareness training for all staff

- Relaxing some personal appearance requirements.

Common adjustments for movement and co-ordination.

Adjustments will vary from person to person, and your colleagues may well have developed their own unique ways of adjusting to common tasks. The only way to know what adjustments you need to make is by talking to the individual concerned. They might know the best ways in which you can support them, but if they do not you may need to seek support from a professional such HR, or Occupational Health.

Some common adjustments that may help are:

- Speech-to-text software
- Ergonomic computer keyboards and mice
- Training in how best to use any equipment they'll use regularly
- More time to complete certain tasks such as handwriting
- Being able to record meetings to avoid having to take notes
- Reassigning some tasks to co-workers (if appropriate, and with both parties' agreement)
- More space at workstation.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution and strategies and adjustments will need to be reviewed and changed over time.

Adjustments – Verbal communication and social interaction.

Some people with neurodiverse conditions can find verbal communication and social interaction more difficult. This can be due to several factors. For example, some autistic people struggle with metaphorical or figurative language. They may also not be able to guess as well how other people are feeling.

Other neurodiverse conditions can relate to different barriers. For example, some people with ADHD find it hard to wait their turn in conversations, or may interrupt or change the subject abruptly.

Potential impact on work.

Inflexible communications

- There may be barriers in your workplace if people are expected to communicate in certain set ways.
- Requiring people to participate verbally in meetings or training sessions, for example, can exclude anyone who finds this difficult and needs more time to process speech and information before answering or contributing. Other people may find it easier to explain their thoughts through storytelling, writing, visual methods or demonstrating.
- Some people may find it easier to talk to one person rather than in a group or online 'break-out' room.

Unclear speech

- Some people can find metaphorical or idiomatic speech confusing. For example, words and phrases like 'across the piece', 'agile' and 'quarterbacking' can exclude people who think more literally.
- Speech can also be unclear when there are groups of people speaking at the same time. Some people can find it challenging to identify who is speaking and what is being said at times like these.

Unwritten social 'rules'

- There are some general social 'rules', such as maintaining eye contact while speaking, that are relatively consistent across some societies. This can be very challenging for many people and should not be forced. If required, then a useful tip is to look at another facial feature instead of the eyes. Most people will not realise this is being done.
- There can also be social rules specific to workplaces, such as always asking if other people want a hot drink when making one for themselves. Another example is saying goodbye to colleagues when they leave for the day.
- Some people find it difficult to understand such 'rules', especially as they're often not made explicit. People can be made to feel rude or unwelcome if they don't adhere to such rules.

What managers can do.

Be flexible

- Let people communicate and interact in their preferred way wherever possible. For example, providing dictation software to a colleague who finds writing difficult may be helpful – rather than expecting them to adapt to ways of communicating and interacting that aren't reasonable for them.

Meetings

- Ask how meetings could be improved to let everyone participate. Be open-minded about trying new approaches. There are some things you can do which will benefit everyone such as:
- Starting and finishing on time
- Providing an agenda and any papers being referred to at the meeting in advance
- Chairing meetings so that people do not talk at the same time or over each other
- Going around the room and to people joining remotely so that everyone gets their say without having to wait to find the right time to speak up
- Letting everyone know how they can contribute during on-line meetings such as via the ‘chat’ facility or using the raised hand icon.

Training

- Training sessions can often be challenging as they may involve group work, fast thinking and on-the-spot answers. The attendees may feel they have little control and are anxious about being picked on for a task or scenario.
- Participants should be given opportunities before any training to ask for any adjustments. They will need to know what is involved in the training, including the format beforehand.
- Provide staff training on neurodiversity and how it can affect communication and social interaction. This should enable more understanding about an individual’s behaviour that might come across as rudeness. It should also prevent the dismissal of contributions from people who find the established ways of interacting and communicating more difficult.

Common adjustments for verbal communication and social interaction.

Your first step should always be to talk to your colleague about potential adjustments. Don’t put in place any adjustments they haven’t asked for and agreed to.

Some common adjustments for communication and social interaction include:

- Technology, such as text-to-speech or speech-to-text software
- Having key phrases available that people can use if necessary in written work. These can be very helpful if a ‘softer’ touch is needed such as for letters to clients, for example
- Altering meeting formats, for example to eliminate cross-talk or to have processes for deciding who should speak

- Training for colleagues about how best to interact with each other, and neurodiversity
- Allowing people to opt out of social events
- Encourage people to use avoid jargon and excessively metaphorical language
- Allow people time to process information and to reply in a way that works best for them. This may mean that this will be after a meeting has ended. Having an agenda and paperwork beforehand should reduce the likelihood of this
- Consider using a coloured badge system for all attendees at large meetings and conferences. This system can allow everyone to indicate if they are happy to talk to anyone, a few select people or if asked first, or that they are not available.

Key points

Each person's communication and social interaction needs will be unique to them.

Just because an individual needs adjustments for one aspect or one situation, does not mean that they will need them all of the time. For example, a colleague may find small talk and networking difficult but be excellent at presenting on stage and answering panel questions at a conference.

Adjustments – Impulsivity and hyperactivity.

Impulsivity and hyperactivity are primarily associated with ADHD, but anyone with a neurodiverse condition may express themselves in a way that seems more impulsive or hyperactive than usual.

What are impulsivity and hyperactivity?

Impulsivity

- Some people will find that they are more prone to taking impulsive decisions and actions that others. In some situations, this can be a great strength such as when there is a need for quick and decisive decision-making in emergency and fast-moving situations.
- It is also associated with risk-taking, interrupting other people, and paying less attention to detail (unless it is a task or topic they are really interested in).

Hyperactivity

- This usually manifests differently in adults from the stereotypical 'hyperactive' child. It is often seen as restlessness, constant talking, getting bored easily, trying to do

multiple things at once, and having a ‘racing’ mind.

What managers can do.

Be open

- Some people who are prone to impulsivity and hyperactivity can manage their work without needing adjustments. However, if you notice that someone you manage is struggling with concentration or deadlines, make sure that they know you’re willing to adapt their work and workplace if they need it.
- Don’t try to diagnose an individual; ask them if they need any support or adaptations. These can be reasonable adjustments which you are required to make to support disabled colleagues.

Be flexible

- You could allow people to work flexible hours, or to work from home – provided they meet their targets and the outputs that you require. Letting your employees control as much of their workload and working practices means that a colleague can take their own steps to accommodate their impulsivity and hyperactivity.

Boost awareness

- There can be significant stigma around impulsivity and hyperactivity, so you could consider awareness training for your team. Some people don’t realise that they need extra support with impulsivity and hyperactivity, so it’s possible you could find yourself managing someone who is unaware that they require adjustments or support.

Common adjustments for impulsivity and hyperactivity.

Impulsivity and hyperactivity can affect individuals differently. Some might know how they work best and the adjustments they need, but others will not. So, you will need to explore this with them, perhaps with the help of a professional who can assess the individual’s needs.

Common adjustments for impulsivity and hyperactivity include:

- More regular catch ups and detailed feedback. These should include looking at workload and timescales as individuals who are prone to impulsivity and hyperactivity will often volunteer to take on new projects but not necessarily have the time management skills to match this enthusiasm

- Allowing use of noise-cancelling headphones or ear plugs to block noise
- Larger computer monitors, or multiple monitors to reduce external distractions
- A more private workspace or working from home some of the time to avoid distractions
- Being able to structure their day especially if they take prescribed medication for impulsivity and hyperactivity
- Have project management, organisation and planning tools that work for them
- Keep meetings and training sessions short or have frequent breaks.
- Encourage doodling and playing with desk ‘toys’ as these can help control and improve concentration
- If interrupting is a challenge in group sessions and meetings, agree a strategy with them that can be used to reduce this. For example, suggesting that they write down points or questions in ‘chat’ or on paper until it is their turn to speak.

Adjustments – Pacing.

This can be challenging for many neurodivergent people for several reasons including:

- Inconsistent energy and concentration levels
- Bursts of productivity matched by periods of procrastination or burnout.
- Working slower than their peers and so spend more time ‘catching up’ – especially if the right adjustments are not in place yet
- Volunteering for too many projects or events, but time management challenges and/or impulsivity mean that there is an impact on existing work and deadlines.

Common adjustments for planning work

Your first step should always be to talk to your colleague about potential adjustments. Don’t put in place any adjustments they haven’t asked for and agreed to.

Some common adjustments for planning work include:

- Good planning of projects – break down work into small tasks with accurate time blocks for each part.
- Factor in buffer days to allow for unscheduled meetings, procrastination and tasks taking longer than estimated.
- Set realistic deadlines. Knowing what is realistic may require some trial and error as you and the employee learn what is needed.
- Accountability buddies – a co-worker with whom they can talk about their work without fear of judgement or repercussions.

- Regular reviews with a manager.
- Flexible working hours when needed to allow working around energy levels and focus ability. Some people work better outside conventional working hours. This should be discussed to ensure that the individual is not working over their paid hours and that they are taking time off in lieu to recover.
- Regularly check for signs of burnout and address promptly.

Neurodiversity inclusive events.

Work and social events can work well for many neurodiverse people, especially if they are good verbal communicators or like bouncing ideas of others to help them process information and problem-solve.

For other neurodivergent people, social and work events can be overwhelming. This can be small events with their team to large conferences. The challenges often relate to reading social cues, small talk, and unwritten rules.

Top tips for neuroinclusive events

- Always invite team members to optional events unless they specifically request not to be asked to certain events. This can help a person feel included in the team but give them the option of attending or not. A person may not feel comfortable attending team social events initially on joining the team but may do so in time.
- Some people like to attend but don't feel comfortable contributing but will contribute later in writing or another mode.
- Let people know in advance what is expected so they can decide if they want to attend and if they need to ask for any adjustments.
- It may be helpful to have a pre-agreed silent signal to indicate if they are feeling uncomfortable such as a communication bangle where the colour on show identifies whether they want to interact.
- A system of silent signals help communicate to the individual that they should complete an action. These should be agreed upon in advance. For example, allow someone else to speak. This can happen if it is a subject they are passionate and very knowledgeable about.
- The signal maybe subtle, such as moving a water bottle to one side of the desk. It can also be used to check if someone is alright – for example, moving the bottle to the middle of the table is asking – "Are you alright?" Signalling "Yes" is putting their bottle in the same place on their desk. Agree on the signals beforehand.
- Have a break-out room for anyone who needs time-out or time to themselves.

- Keep sessions short so that people can go for a walk to help pace their energy levels, for example.
- Some people find applause is too loud and may request that people wave instead, known as ‘flappause.’
- Don’t expect someone to do something they are uncomfortable with – ask what they would like to do. For example, they may prefer monitoring the online or chat features at a conference rather than networking with people in person.
- Some people will find attending a whole conference difficult and prefer to attend parts of it in person. They may also find socialising at meals and welcome events challenging. Ideally, they should not need to attend all these social events in these situations.