

# Supporting Neurodivergent Employees with Disclosure in your Organisation



## Workplace Guide Series

This guide is designed to help employers understand not only the practical and legal aspects of disclosure but also the emotional journey involved and its impact on outcomes for everyone involved. By gaining a comprehensive understanding, we can implement strategies that better support our employees, optimising our energy and resources to create positive outcomes for both our people and our organisations. This approach helps avoid expending time and resources on ineffective practices that can lead to unnecessary costs and potential reputational damage, something we all work hard to avoid.

## Understanding the Neurodivergent Journey

Neurodivergent employees, particularly those diagnosed later in life have often faced a lifelong journey of being **misunderstood, misdiagnosed, and navigating a world not designed for them**. Many have struggled significantly in various areas of their lives—academically, socially, and professionally—without understanding why. Whether diagnosis happened earlier or later in life, the reality is the person is likely to have faced significant challenges.

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**I constantly got negative feedback from teachers and from peers around my behaviour, my social skills and my academic capability. I believed I was stupid and I have had to work so hard to undo the damage.**

James, 37, Coaching Client



As awareness grows, and medical paradigms shift, lots of individuals are seeking a diagnosis later in life to get answers to these challenges.

Receiving a diagnosis can be a profound moment of clarity, but it also comes after months or even years of waiting and seeking answers. Unfortunately, the diagnosis often comes with little more than a report outlining how the conclusion was reached by clinicians, leaving individuals to navigate the complexities of their condition largely on their own. Resources to support people are scarce and for a short time, the hard work becomes even harder for your employee as they mentally start a new part of their lives having to search for resources and support to help them.

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**All the way through my life, I knew I was working harder than everyone else, but I had always thought it was because I was stupid, careless, lazy and that just made me work harder in my job to get the recognition I craved.**

Michelle, 37, Coaching Client



When employees reach out to their employer for support, it's not just about seeking accommodations; it's often a critical point in their lives where they are looking for **validation, understanding, and the practical support** that has been lacking. This moment, when an employee discloses their neurodivergence, is a critical "moment that matters." The way an employer responds can set the tone for the employee's future within the organisation and can be the difference between their success or failure.

### The Moment That Matters

When an employee discloses their neurodivergence, it is a **brave and vulnerable** moment. They have likely spent a considerable amount of time weighing the risks and benefits of disclosing this information. The response they receive can either validate their decision and empower them or make them feel unsupported and misunderstood. It is essential for employers, particularly managers and HR professionals, to handle this moment with care, empathy, and respect.

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Telling my workplace was a huge deal, I was scared, hopeful, and still reeling from the diagnosis, but it felt like I might be finally able to get some things that might help and that was why I pushed myself to do it.

Amanda, 50, Coaching Client

### Examples of What to Say

**"Thank you for sharing this with us."**

Acknowledge the courage it took for the employee to disclose their neurodivergence.

**"We are committed to supporting you."**

Reassure the employee that their well-being and success are a priority for the organisation.

**"Let's work together to understand what accommodations might help you thrive."**

Show willingness to collaborate and find solutions tailored to their needs.

- ✓ Reinforce the employee's value to the team and the organisation.
- ✓ Emphasise that the organisation values the individual for their unique skills and strengths, not just their diagnosis.

#### Examples of What Not to Say:

**"Are you sure you need accommodations?"**

This can come across as dismissive or doubting their needs.

**"We've never dealt with this before, so we don't know what to do."**

While honesty is important, this statement can make the employee feel like a burden.

Instead, express a willingness to learn and seek guidance.

**"We are all a little bit ADHD/Autistic/Dyslexic /OCD/Other."**

This phrase invalidates the very real and often intense struggles that neurodivergent individuals face. It minimises their experience and suggests that their challenges are something everyone experiences, which is not the case.

**"Everyone has challenges; you just need to try harder."**

This minimises the unique struggles neurodivergent individuals face and can be incredibly harmful. They have likely had to try harder all their lives, this is your opportunity to show them you are willing to support them in making things easier.

### "What do you need?"

While this might seem like a supportive question, it places the burden on the employee to diagnose their own needs, which can be overwhelming, especially when they are already frustrated and exhausted. Remember there is no post diagnostic support that helps people understand their condition. Instead, have policies and resources in place so that managers and HR can quickly and supportively offer appropriate accommodations.

## Looking Beyond the Label

It's crucial to see neurodivergent employees as individuals, not just as a diagnosis. Labels can be helpful for understanding certain challenges, but they don't define the person. Each neurodivergent individual has their own unique set of strengths, talents, and perspectives that they bring to the table. By focusing on the person rather than the label, employers can create a more inclusive and supportive environment where neurodivergent employees feel valued for who they are, not just for their diagnosis.

## Asking the Right Questions

Don't be afraid to ask the employee how they would prefer to be referred to or what terminology they are comfortable with. Some neurodivergent people may prefer identity-first language (e.g., "Autistic person"), while others might prefer person-first language (e.g., "person with autism"). It's important to respect their preferences, as this demonstrates a commitment to seeing them as an individual rather than just a condition. The key here is to remain people centric, and if you are not sure just ask. We all get things wrong but by asking the question you show respect and curiosity for that person and their preferences. **Remember to keep it Human.**

### Key Phrases to Use:

- ✓ "How would you like us to refer to your condition, if at all?"
- ✓ "Is there any specific language or terminology you prefer we use?"

This approach not only respects the employee's preferences but also opens the door to a more personalised and supportive dialogue.

## **Confidentiality and Medical Information**

It is crucial to respect the confidentiality of the employee's medical information. Any details shared by the employee regarding their diagnosis should not be disclosed to others within the organisation without the employee's explicit permission. This includes not only colleagues but also other departments or team members who do not need to know. Breaching this confidentiality can lead to a breakdown in trust and may have legal implications.

### **Key Points:**

- ✓ Ensure that any medical information is stored securely and only accessible to those who need it for providing support.
- ✓ Do not discuss the employee's condition or accommodations with others unless the employee has given clear, informed consent.
- ✓ Respect the employee's privacy and be mindful of the language used when discussing their needs with others.

## **Legal Responsibilities**

Neurodivergent conditions are likely to be classed as a disability. Under the Equality Act 2010, employers in the UK are legally required to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that disabled employees are not at a disadvantage compared to their peers. This means providing accommodations that allow neurodivergent employees to perform their jobs effectively. Failure to do so can result in legal action, costs, and damage to the organisation's reputation.

### **Reasonable Adjustments Might Include:**

- ✓ Adjusting work hours or providing flexible working arrangements.
- ✓ Modifying the work environment to reduce sensory overload (e.g., noise-cancelling headphones, quieter workspaces).
- ✓ Providing additional support such as a job coach, mentor, or assistive technology.
- ✓ Allowing more frequent breaks or offering adjustments to task management.

## **Reasonable Adjustments: Beyond Access to Work**

Access to Work is a government grant that supports those with disabilities in staying in work, it can support paying for accommodations to support your employee. Providing reasonable adjustments is a critical aspect of supporting people, but it's **important not to rely solely on Access to Work as the primary means of granting these adjustments**. While Access to Work can provide valuable support, the current waiting time of up to six months is too long for an employee who needs immediate assistance to participate and perform fully in the workplace.

Also consider that any accommodations need time to be integrated into the employees working practices and so six months becomes nine or twelve months just to see an impact.

**Employers should be proactive in offering reasonable adjustments without delay.**

This may require thinking outside the box and seeking expert advice to determine the most effective accommodations. A workplace needs assessment conducted by a neurodiversity specialist can be invaluable in identifying specific adjustments that can make a significant difference.

These workplace needs assessments do not look at the label, they go beyond that to view the person and take into account the job role and responsibilities, the environment, relationships at work as well as day to day support with tasks. This is a complete 360 degree review that gives employees the best chance of success. By employing a needs assessor who is an expert in the field, you get targeted recommendations and most do not cost much, many are actually free. Be wary of providers who only offer a list of accessible technology with some generic training as although employees may feel happy to begin with that they have got this support, many individuals report that generic accommodations, over time, actually create more stress and do not support their needs appropriately, feeding confidence challenges and further fuelling self criticism.

## **Occupational Health Vs a Specialist Workplace Needs Assessment**

When supporting neurodivergent individuals in the workplace, it's important to be cautious about relying solely on occupational health assessments rather than specialist workplace needs assessments.

Here's why:

1. **Expertise and Understanding:** Occupational health professionals typically focus on general health and safety issues, and while they may

have some understanding of neurodivergence, they may not possess the deep, specialised knowledge required to fully comprehend the unique challenges and needs of neurodivergent individuals. Specialist assessments, on the other hand, are conducted by experts with specific training in neurodiversity, ensuring a more accurate and tailored approach to accommodations.

2. **Tailored Recommendations:** Specialist workplace needs assessments are designed to identify specific accommodations and strategies that directly address the unique cognitive, sensory, and emotional needs of neurodivergent employees. These assessments provide personalised recommendations that are more likely to be effective in supporting the individual's performance and well-being in the workplace.
3. **Risk of Inadequate Support:** Relying solely on occupational health assessments may result in generic or inadequate recommendations that don't fully address the complexities of neurodivergence. This can lead to ineffective support, which may increase stress, reduce productivity, and ultimately harm the employee's experience and success at work.
4. **Legal and Ethical Considerations:** Providing appropriate accommodations is not only a matter of good practice but also a legal requirement under disability discrimination laws. Specialist assessments help ensure that employers are meeting their legal obligations by providing the most relevant and effective support, thereby reducing the risk of legal repercussions.
5. **Ongoing Adaptability:** Specialist assessments are more likely to consider the evolving nature of neurodivergent needs. They can provide guidance on how to monitor and adjust accommodations over time, ensuring that support remains effective as the employee's circumstances or job role changes.

In summary, while occupational health assessments are valuable, they may not provide the level of expertise required to fully support neurodivergent employees. Specialist workplace needs assessments offer a more nuanced, tailored approach, ensuring that accommodations are both appropriate and effective, ultimately leading to better outcomes for both the employee and the organisation.

In lots of cases it may be recommended that you engage both a medical practitioner like an occupational health specialist and a workplace needs assessor to provide support on more complex conditions.

## Documenting Reasonable Adjustments

When documenting reasonable adjustments for an employee, it is essential to collaborate closely with them to ensure their needs are accurately understood and met. An assessment is the start of this but as an employer you should continue to check in on how the adjustments are supporting the individual and keep on top of any changing circumstances. Begin by discussing the specific accommodations required and agreeing on how they will be implemented. This agreement should be recorded in a clear, concise format, outlining each adjustment and its intended purpose. Emphasise that this document is not static but a living, breathing record that should be regularly reviewed and updated to ensure ongoing suitability. Regular reviews help ensure the adjustments remain effective and continue to support the employee's evolving needs in the workplace.

### Key Actions for Employers:

- ✓ **Don't wait for Access to Work:** Implement reasonable adjustments as soon as possible to support the employee in their role. Delaying accommodations can lead to further stress and hinder the employee's performance.
- ✓ **Seek expert advice:** Engage with neurodiversity specialists who can conduct workplace needs assessments and provide tailored recommendations for accommodations.
- ✓ **Train internal teams:** Ensure that managers and HR professionals are trained to understand and that you have a process for reasonable adjustments that can be implemented quickly. Having knowledgeable teams in-house can reduce delays and provide immediate support to employees.
- ✓ **Agree accommodations in writing and check in regularly:** your employee may work out new challenges they face or accommodations may not be helpful, so need updating or review.
- ✓ **Keep the outcome in mind:** The purpose is to get the person to equity, remove barriers and provide immediate and ongoing support, keep this in mind however you decide to approach it.

By taking these steps, employers can ensure that neurodivergent employees receive the support they need promptly, allowing them to thrive and contribute fully to the organisation.

## **Preparing for the Moment That Matters**

Preparation is key to ensuring that the "moment that matters" is handled effectively. Employers can take several proactive steps:

### **1. Training for Managers and HR Professionals:**

- ✓ Provide training on neurodiversity, focusing on understanding different neurodivergent conditions and the common challenges faced by neurodivergent individuals.
- ✓ Equip managers with communication strategies that emphasise empathy, active listening, and support.
- ✓ Educate staff on the legal responsibilities regarding neurodivergent employees under the Equality Act 2010.

### **2. Creating a Neuroinclusive Culture:**

- ✓ Promote an inclusive environment where diversity of thought and experience is valued.
- ✓ Encourage open conversations about neurodiversity and mental health in the workplace to reduce stigma.
- ✓ Develop and share clear policies on how the organisation supports neurodivergent employees.

### **3. Establishing Clear Processes:**

- ✓ Have a clear, accessible process in place for requesting accommodations.
- ✓ Ensure that neurodivergent employees know whom they can approach for support and how their requests will be handled.
- ✓ Regularly review and update accommodation policies to ensure they are effective and relevant.
- ✓ Avoid placing the burden on the employee to diagnose their own needs; instead, provide them with options and support from the start. Ensure that managers and HR are prepared to act quickly and effectively without unnecessary delays.

## **Avoiding the 'Special Treatment Trap'**

When supporting neurodivergent employees, it's crucial to avoid falling into the "special treatment trap," where accommodations are viewed as giving someone an unfair advantage. This can cause resentment and result in further isolation for the employee. Instead, think of accommodations as a way to level the playing field, ensuring all employees have the tools they need to perform their best. The goal is to achieve equity, not to offer special treatment.

### How to Avoid the Trap:

- ✓ **Training and Awareness:** Educate all employees, especially managers, on the importance of accommodations and how they contribute to a fair and inclusive workplace. Regular training on neurodiversity and equity helps shift the mindset from "special treatment" to "necessary support."
- ✓ **Clear Communication:** Clearly explain that accommodations are designed to ensure everyone has equal opportunities to succeed, fostering understanding and reducing misconceptions.
- ✓ **Inclusive Policies:** Develop and promote policies that normalise accommodations as a standard part of supporting all employees, not just those who are neurodivergent.

By focusing on creating a truly inclusive environment, where accommodations are seen as standard practice to support diverse needs, organisations can foster a culture of fairness and mutual respect. This approach benefits everyone, allowing all employees to thrive without stigma or resentment.

### The Benefits of Being Neuroinclusive

Every individual in your organisation can be classed as neurodiverse, meaning that each person processes information, thinks, and learns in unique ways. Your organisation is neurodiverse already, as brain diversity includes everyone and is as real as bio diversity or gender diversity, but are you making it neuroinclusive? Recognising this diversity and fostering a neuroinclusive environment benefits everyone by creating a workplace where different ways of thinking are valued and supported. It is the ultimate in person centric organisational design. By embracing neuroinclusion, you not only provide essential support for neurodivergent employees but also enhance creativity, problem-solving, and overall team performance. A neuroinclusive culture ensures that all employees have the opportunity to thrive, bringing their best and most authentic selves to work, which ultimately drives innovation and success for the entire organisation.

Embracing neurodiversity isn't just about fulfilling legal obligations; it's also a smart business strategy. Neurodivergent employees bring unique perspectives, problem-solving skills, and creativity that can drive innovation and success and by including everyone in this approach you create the landscape for everyone to succeed and be at their best.

By fostering a neuroinclusive environment, organisations can:

- ✓ **Attract and Retain Talent:** Neurodivergent individuals often possess high levels of dedication and specialised skills. A supportive environment can attract top talent and reduce turnover.
- ✓ **Enhance Team Performance:** Diverse teams, including those with neurodivergent members, tend to perform better because they approach problems from different angles.
- ✓ **Boost Innovation:** Neurodivergent employees often think outside the box, offering creative solutions and new ways of thinking that can lead to breakthrough innovations.
- ✓ **Improve Employee Engagement and Satisfaction:** When employees feel understood and supported, they are more likely to be engaged, productive, and loyal to the organisation.

## Creating a Culture of Inclusion

It's important to recognise that many neurodivergent employees may choose not to disclose their condition to their employer out of fear of potential consequences, such as stigma, discrimination, or being treated differently by colleagues and management. Studies and research show this to be as high as 50%. This means that some employees are silently struggling, masking their challenges, and trying to fit into an environment that doesn't fully accommodate their needs.

The very best way to support both disclosed and undisclosed neurodivergent employees—and indeed all employees—is to work on creating a culture of inclusion. When an organisation fosters an environment where diversity is genuinely valued and neurodivergent individuals feel safe and supported, employees are more likely to come forward and seek the accommodations they need, this benefits the person and the organisation.

### How to Create a Culture of Inclusion:

- ✓ **Lead by example:** Leadership should openly discuss and support diversity and inclusion initiatives, demonstrating that these values are a priority for the organisation.
- ✓ **Educate the workforce:** Regularly provide training on neurodiversity and inclusion to all employees, helping to reduce stigma and increase understanding.
- ✓ **Develop inclusive policies:** Ensure that your policies reflect a commitment to inclusivity and provide clear guidelines for supporting neurodivergent employees as well as the wider population. The best approach is to introduce policies that apply to everyone as we all have unique ways of thinking and processing the world.

- ✓ **Encourage open communication:** Create channels for employees to share their experiences and needs in a safe, non-judgmental environment.
- ✓ **Celebrate diversity:** Recognise and celebrate the unique strengths and contributions that neurodivergent employees bring to the organisation.
- ✓ **Seek an expert to support you on reviewing your current workplace practices and culture and create a roadmap to take steps towards this.**

By supporting neurodivergent employees with the right accommodations and fostering a culture of inclusion, employers not only ensure that employees are at equity with their peers but also enhance the overall performance and well-being of the organisation. When employees feel safe, supported, and valued, they are more likely to contribute their best work, leading to better outcomes for both the individual and the organisation.

## Conclusion

Supporting neurodivergent employees requires more than just meeting legal requirements. It involves understanding the emotional journey these individuals have undergone, responding with empathy during the "moment that matters," and creating a workplace culture that values and supports diversity. By looking beyond the label, asking the right questions, maintaining confidentiality, offering prompt and effective accommodations, and working towards a truly inclusive culture, employers not only fulfil their responsibilities but also unlock the potential for greater innovation, engagement, and success within their organisation.

Human to Human approaches deliver results, reduce risk and create a differentiator in your business that cannot be replicated. They do not happen by accident, they are the result of intentional effort.

We can help support you in every element of this process from training your managers and HR teams to full audits and policy reviews, to workplace needs assessments and employee coaching.



**\*\*\*Want to be more inclusive but don't know where to start?\*\*\***

Consider our organisational pledge that provides a roadmap, policies and guidance on becoming more Neuroinclusive for as little as £99.00.



**Get in touch with us today to learn more about the pledge and our other services including expert training, neurodiversity workplace needs assessments, coaching and consultancy.**

**You can view the full range of services below.**

If you have any feedback for us on this guide, any questions or would like to discuss anything further, please feel free to book a 30 minute virtual coffee with me [here](#).



## Our Services

01



### Awareness Training

We can offer awareness training for your organisation as a lunch and learn or as a webinar with some resources that you can distribute afterwards to support Neurodiversity in your organisation. We can bespoke this to you and your environment or offer E Learning solutions for your LMS. This gives the foundation for understanding in your business.

02



### Setting up ERG's and Champions

This is a great thing to do and lots of businesses end up with champions or Employee Representative Groups that create networks, advise and support the business in meeting diversity objectives. We can help with training but also creating a team vision, plus some objectives that link to the business goals and some guidance so that these groups have the right support from day one to succeed and deliver value to your business and your diversity aims.

03



### Neuroinclusive Workplace Roadmap

We can support you in creating a more Neuroinclusive workplace with our comprehensive roadmap and resources kit, this provides you with a badge to let the outside world know you are serious about Neuroinclusion and gives you a framework to work towards, we offer services to support you on your journey or you can do it yourself, and our roadmap will help guide you.

04



### Managed Services Support

We can offer Neurodiversity consultancy services on an ongoing monthly, quarterly or annual basis to support you in your Neurodiversity aims. By doing this as a service you get discounted rates and it helps keep you on track with your plans. We can also offer ongoing general coaching services on a recurring service, see below.

[www.thinkdif.uk](http://www.thinkdif.uk)

## Our Services

05



### Strategy Coaching for Neurodivergent Employees

If you have a Neurodivergent employee who requires strategy coaching to help them integrate adjustments into the workplace, understand their strengths and challenges, move them forward in work and in life then we can help. Strategy Coaching is one of the most effective tools to achieve this.

We also offer monthly wellness coaching services where we can give you a day a month and work with up to four coachees a day so that you are offering a more flexible service to those who need it.

06



### Coaching Managers and Training HR Teams

We can coach managers to support how to manage any team members who may be Neurodivergent, this can really help create trust and understanding and enable both the employee and the manager to succeed.

We can help your HR team to understand Neurodiversity and specifically how to manage a Neurodivergent employee who discloses to your organisation.

07



### 'Creating Neuroinclusive Teams' Workshop

It is important that there is a general awareness in your organisation around Neurodiversity but this workshop takes it one step further and helps teams to see that we are all brain diverse and they create a 'This is Me' manual in the session and share each others preferences and working styles, leading to better collaboration and performance for everyone.

08



### Workplace Needs Assessments

Workplace adjustments have to be tailored appropriately to support the person to be at equity and to perform at work. Out the box solutions will not work for the employee and could end up making things worse. Meet your legal obligations, create a supportive environment and have adjustments that actually help your employee to perform by using our expert service.

[www.thinkdif.uk](http://www.thinkdif.uk)