



Neurodiversity Awareness and Considerations

1. Introduction:

This handout has been created by Mac Macdonald of LaPD Solutions Ltd, who has been diagnosed with autism. Much of the content in this document reflects his own thinking, supplemented over the years by the perspectives of many other neurodivergent people, drawn from their shared lived experiences.



It is not meant to be a definitive instructional document, but purely a “Food for thought” document for you to use for ideas and possible solutions.

Conditions that come under the umbrella of “Neurodivergent” (ND) include autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, Tourette’s, Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA) and many others. ND colleagues often face challenges and barriers that neurotypical (NT) people do not. Those challenges are usually **environmental and cultural** rather than a lack of capability.

2. Need to Know:

Just like any human, no two neurodivergent (ND) or neurotypical (NT) individuals are the same, and they will have different preferences and needs, even when they have the same conditions.

There is only **one way** to discover a colleague’s individual preferences and needs: ask the right questions, in the right way, use emotional intelligence, and specifically the Moccasin Approach® (see 3 below).

Remember, as with the start of any relationship (new friend, partner, work colleague), not everything is disclosed immediately; both NT and ND people often wait until trust has been established before sharing everything, so expect their preferences and needs to change as they feel psychologically safe to share them. (This is one reason why High Performing Teams [HPTs] are critical to team and organisational success).

Reasonable adjustments may differ between teams depending on team size or the type of work they carry out. The organisation must be transparent about this with HR and their HRBPs (HR Business Partners), monitoring and supporting each team whilst sharing best practice across the organisation.

3. The Moccasin Approach®

- a. Why is it called the Moccasin Approach? – The term is based on the thinking of a well-known phrase that goes something like this... “Walk two moons in another person’s moccasins (shoes) before judging them”.
- b. What is it? – In brief, the Moccasin Approach is an Emotional Intelligence technique that is deemed to be the best way to communicate with pretty much everyone. This document focuses on our working environments, but LaPD Solutions believes that the Moccasin Approach should be used at work, at home, with friends, and, in short, in all our communications with anyone.



- c. How does it work? Instead of diving in to communicate with others from our own blinkered perspective, we should consider their perspective as well by considering their world and challenges. That way, we show that we care and, importantly, that we communicate in an informed way rather than purely from our perspective.

This begs the question, “What if I know nothing about them”? This may well happen, and **depending on the situation**, you may be able to gain knowledge as you begin your communication. It proves just how important it is to build and maintain relationships within and across teams.

- d. Why is it so important to use this with our colleagues? – Due to the lived experiences of some people (both ND and NT), they may already be reluctant to share their worries, concerns and especially their fears when they are being interviewed or when they start their onboarding and meet their new colleagues. So we need to find a gentle way to discover all we can, so we can make their working environment (physical and mental) as comfortable as possible. This will enable them to show their true selves to their colleagues and produce the best results for the team and the organisation.

4. Strengths & Contributions of ND Colleagues

Neurodivergent colleagues bring distinctive strengths that are often overlooked when the focus falls solely on challenges. Recognising and valuing these strengths shifts the conversation from accommodation to advantage.

- **Hyper-focus and deep expertise** – Many ND individuals can sustain intense concentration on tasks they find meaningful, producing exceptionally detailed and thorough work.
- **Pattern recognition and analytical thinking** – Spotting trends, inconsistencies, and connections that others may miss.
- **Creative and innovative problem-solving** – Thinking differently is not a deficit; it is often the source of breakthrough ideas and novel approaches.
- **Honesty, directness, and loyalty** – Many ND colleagues communicate with refreshing clarity and show strong commitment to their teams and organisations.
- **Attention to detail and accuracy** – Particularly valuable in quality assurance, data analysis, compliance, and technical roles.
- **Resilience and determination** – Navigating a world not designed for them builds tenacity that transfers directly into the workplace.
- **Unique perspectives in teams** – Cognitive diversity strengthens decision-making and reduces groupthink.



When organisations focus on what ND colleagues can do rather than what they struggle with, both the individual and the organisation benefit.

5. Common Neurodivergent Experiences at Work and Possible Impacts

ND colleagues often face challenges and barriers that neurotypical (NT) people do not. Those challenges are, for the most part, due to the demands of their workplace environment and to a lack of knowledge and understanding among their colleagues, rather than to a lack of capability. Read through, discuss and consider the following common challenges.

a. Recruitment & Onboarding

- Interviews that unconsciously prioritise social skills over necessary job skills.
- Vague job criteria and “culture fit” bias (they won’t fit in well).
- No adjustments offered or discussed (it is assumed they’re not neurodiverse).
- Overwhelming or unstructured onboarding.



Possible impacts: Talented people are excluded before they start.

Suggestions: Ensure the approach includes how ND colleagues will be supported.

b. Disclosure & Psychological Safety

- Fear of discrimination after disclosure.
- Being stereotyped, infantilised, or micromanaged.
- Condition questioned or minimised.
- Personal information shared without consent.



Possible impacts: Employees mask differences, increasing stress and burnout.

Suggestions: Outline how the organisation supports any ND colleagues.

c. Work Environment

- Sensory overload (noise, lighting, open-plan offices, colleague chatter).
- Hot-desking and frequent change.
- Lack of quiet or low-stimulation spaces.
- Frequent interruptions.

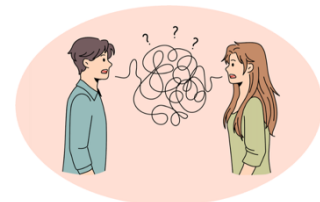


Possible impacts: Reduced focus, irritation due to frustration, fatigue, and performance.

Suggestions: Give examples of reasonable adjustments that ND colleagues already enjoy.

d. Communication & Expectations

- Unspoken rules and unclear priorities.
- Ambiguous instructions or last-minute changes.
- Meetings that reward fast verbal processing.
- Written or verbal preferences ignored.



Possible impacts: Misunderstandings/miscommunication, anxiety, and unfair judgments/assumptions (conscious and unconscious).

Suggestions: Give examples of how all the above are considered and supported.

e. Performance Management

- Judged on how work is done, not results.
- Feedback is unclear, inconsistent, or delayed (one-to-one chats are critical here).
- Neurodivergent behavioural traits are assumed to be “attitude” issues.
- Strengths overlooked.

Possible impacts: Capability misinterpreted as underperformance.

Suggestions: Explain how performance is output and results-driven, and how support for ND colleagues in terms of their communication style is a priority.

f. Career Progression

- “Leadership” equated with extroversion.
- Passed over due to “not fitting in”.
- Limited access to mentoring or sponsorship.
- Assumptions about resilience or people skills.

Possible impacts: Despite strong work ethics and performance, a stalled career.

Suggestions: These are often due to a lack of awareness; ensure awareness and refresher training for all colleagues, and consider the certification suggestion below.

g. Social Inclusion & Culture

- Exclusion from informal networks.
- Microaggressions and “jokes”.
- Pressure to conform or mask.
- Being labelled “difficult” or “awkward”.



Possible impacts: Isolation, disengagement, reduced retention.

Suggestions: Again, ensure awareness training is mandatory and refresh it.

h. Reasonable Adjustments

- Adjustments delayed, refused, or inconsistently applied.
- Managers are unsure of Equality Act responsibilities.
- Adjustments framed as “special treatment”.
- One-size-fits-all solutions.

Possible impacts: Legal risk and preventable disadvantage.

Suggestions: HR can ensure that regular training and updates are available to ensure colleagues actively support these initiatives.

i. Wellbeing & Mental Health

- Chronic stress from masking.
- Anxiety around unpredictability.
- Burnout and exhaustion.
- Higher sickness absence or presenteeism.

Possible impacts: Depression and reduced retention.

Suggestions: Ensure that all your MHFAs (Mental Health First Aiders) are equally knowledgeable about ND-specific needs and what to look out for.



All of the above can be enhanced by having volunteer ND mentors for new ND colleagues who can help them learn to work with others in a mutually respectful manner (considering both ND & NT perspectives), and by signposting with examples and even chatting with other ND colleagues to learn from their lived experiences.

If you go down this route, be sure to share this with all interviewees **prior** to their interviews so they know they are applying to work in a neuroinclusive organisation. Post this with job adverts and in posts on LinkedIn and social media, proudly showing how your organisation is actively neuroinclusive.

Also consider certifying various colleagues involved in performance management, talent identification, advancement opportunities, and conducting interviews, etc., in ND awareness, so that it also gives prospective employees confidence that they will be entering a **proactive** neuroinclusive organisation.

6. Practical Tips & Quick Wins for Managers

Many effective adjustments cost nothing and take very little time. The following are practical, low-cost actions that managers can implement quickly:

- Share meeting agendas in advance – Giving even 24 hours' notice allows ND colleagues to prepare, reducing anxiety and improving contribution.
- Provide written instructions alongside verbal ones – Many ND people process written information more effectively. Follow up conversations with a brief email or message.
- Offer flexible working arrangements – Allowing quiet working time, remote work, or adjusted hours can dramatically improve focus and well-being.
- Create a low-stimulation space – A quiet room or bookable desk away from high-traffic areas gives colleagues a retreat when sensory overload strikes.
- Be explicit about expectations – Avoid vague instructions. State deadlines, priorities, and the standard of work expected clearly.
- Offer noise-cancelling headphones or ear defenders – A small investment that can transform an open-plan office for sensory-sensitive colleagues.
- Check in regularly using one-to-one meetings – Brief, structured check-ins build trust and surface issues before they escalate. Ask open questions and give colleagues time to respond.
- Allow processing time – After meetings or instructions, give colleagues time to absorb information before expecting a response.
- Be consistent with routines – Minimise unnecessary last-minute changes. Where change is unavoidable, communicate it as early as possible with clear reasoning and the benefits it will bring.
- Ask, don't assume – Every ND individual is different. Ask what works for them rather than relying on assumptions or generalisations.



These adjustments benefit many colleagues, not just those who are neurodivergent. Good management practices for ND colleagues are good management practices for everyone.



7. "What to Do If..." Quick Reference

The following scenarios are common in the workplace. Use these as a starting point — every situation is unique, so always apply the Moccasin Approach®.

A colleague discloses they are neurodivergent:

Thank them for sharing. Ask what support would help them most. Do not share this information with anyone without their explicit consent. Follow up in a one-to-one setting.

Someone asks for a reasonable adjustment:

Take it seriously and act promptly. You do not need a formal diagnosis to make adjustments. Discuss options with the colleague, agree on a plan, and review it regularly.

You are unsure whether an adjustment is reasonable:

Consult your HR Business Partner or occupational health team. The legal threshold is lower than most managers assume — most effective adjustments are simple and inexpensive.

You witness a microaggression or “joke” about neurodiversity:

Address it calmly and promptly. Make it clear that dismissive or mocking comments about neurodiversity are not acceptable, whether or not the person targeted is present.

A colleague seems to be struggling, but has not disclosed anything:

Open a supportive conversation using the Moccasin Approach®. You might say: “I’ve noticed you seem to be finding [specific situation] challenging — is there anything I can do to help?” Do not speculate about diagnoses.

An adjustment that works for one colleague is questioned by others as “unfair”:

Explain that fairness means giving people what they need to succeed, not giving everyone the same thing. Equity and equality are different — use this as a learning moment for the team.

8. Legal Context: The Equality Act 2010

Under the Equality Act 2010, neurodivergent conditions such as autism, ADHD, and dyslexia can constitute a disability if they have a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. Employers have a legal duty to make reasonable adjustments to prevent disabled employees from being placed at a substantial disadvantage.

Key points for managers and organisations:

- You do not need to wait for a formal diagnosis or disclosure — if you are aware (or ought reasonably to be aware) that an employee may be disabled, the duty to adjust applies.
- Reasonable adjustments are not optional extras; they are a legal requirement. Failure to provide them can amount to unlawful discrimination.
- Adjustments should be tailored to the individual. What is “reasonable” depends on factors including the size and resources of the organisation, the cost of the adjustment, and its effectiveness.
- Discrimination can be direct (treating someone less favourably due of their condition) or indirect (applying a policy or practice that disadvantages disabled employees as a group).
- Harassment and victimisation related to disability are also unlawful under the Act.

This is not legal advice. Organisations should consult their legal teams or ACAS for specific guidance. However, understanding the basics empowers managers to act confidently and correctly.



9. Signposting & Further Resources

The following resources provide further guidance on neurodiversity in the workplace, legal responsibilities, and available support:

- ACAS (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service) — Free guidance on reasonable adjustments, disability discrimination, and workplace disputes: www.acas.org.uk
- Access to Work Scheme (UK Government) — A grant scheme that can pay for practical support to help disabled people start or stay in work, including specialist equipment, support workers, and travel costs: www.gov.uk/access-to-work
- Equality Act 2010 — The full text and explanatory notes are available at: www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents
- National Autistic Society — Employer resources, workplace guides, and the Autism at Work programme: www.autism.org.uk
- ADHD Foundation — Workplace neurodiversity training and resources: www.adhdfoundation.org.uk
- British Dyslexia Association — Workplace guidance and employer accreditation: www.bdadyslexia.org.uk
- Neurodiversity in Business (NiB) — A forum for organisations committed to neuroinclusion: www.neurodiversityinbusiness.org
- LaPD Solutions Ltd — Neurodiversity awareness training, consultancy, and the Moccasin Approach®: Contact details in the footer of this document.

Your organisation may also have internal resources, Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs), occupational health services, or neurodiversity champions. Check with your HR team.

10. Summary and key message

ND people who are not catered for as best as possible by the organisation they work for, and the colleagues they work with, exhibit reactions and behaviours due to the follow-on behaviours of their triggers, and this can be received as negative behaviour. But in truth, ND colleagues rarely fail the workplace or their organisation, as it is more often that their workplaces and organisations fail them. **ND awareness training** helps leaders, managers and colleagues understand the challenges, what they mean to them, and how to support them.

Offering reasonable adjustments to their working environment and working practices (as much as is possible and fair to all colleagues) can make a massive difference to them and help them perform to the best of their abilities.

Differences, such as neurodiversity, disability, English as a second language, and cultural differences, can all cause challenges for people, so the more we work together to support all the differences people have, the better outcomes, well-being, and retention for everyone.

