

Adjustments for neurodiversity

When agreeing reasonable adjustments for neurodivergent workers, it's important to consider both:

- making the most of someone's strengths
- support for things they find more difficult

Some neurodivergent people do not see themselves as disabled. However, being neurodivergent will often amount to a disability under the Equality Act 2010.

Some well-known types of neurodivergence are ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), autism, dyslexia and dyspraxia.

[Find out more about neurodiversity at work](#)

Whether someone needs a diagnosis

A worker does not need a diagnosis to be considered disabled under the Equality Act 2010.

An employer should offer workers support whether or not they have a diagnosis for their neurodivergence. This includes making reasonable adjustments.

An employer might ask a worker for proof that they have a condition. For example, an NHS letter confirming a diagnosis. However, a worker:

- is not legally required to provide this
- might not have any proof they can give
- might have their own reasons for not sharing a diagnosis

If someone does not have a diagnosis

It's common for workers not to have a diagnosis. Reasons for this include that:

- they're worried about a negative reaction from others
- they do not feel they need to have one
- it can take a long time to be diagnosed – there are long NHS waiting times
- getting one can be expensive – if a worker decides to use private healthcare because of the long NHS waiting times

Someone can be diagnosed at any stage in their life. Things people can go through as an adult can also make neurodivergent traits more obvious, leading to a diagnosis. For example, the menopause or having long covid.

Even if they do not have a diagnosis, workers might have neurodivergent characteristics. And this could mean they need support at work.

It can be emotionally difficult for workers who:

- are struggling with a condition but do not have a diagnosis
- have recently got a diagnosis

In both circumstances, having the right support at work can be a big help.

Examples of reasonable adjustments

People often experience neurodivergence differently. The strengths and challenges that come with a condition will not be the same for everyone.

This means that adjustments that suit one neurodivergent person might not help someone else with the same condition.

Employers should listen to the worker when discussing reasonable adjustments and make suggestions where appropriate.

Someone might not know what support will help them. Especially if:

- they have recently been diagnosed and are still understanding it themselves
- they're not sure whether they have a condition

In these circumstances, employers and workers should work together to [try out adjustments and regularly review them](#).

Employers and workers might be able to get help from occupational health or a GP when deciding what adjustments are suitable.

Concentration

Adjustments that could help a worker to concentrate include:

- headphones, ear defenders or earplugs that remove external sensory noises
- fidget toys
- a standing desk
- regular breaks throughout the day
- a quiet place to work away from distractions

For example, a worker who has ADHD works in a call centre. They use a standing desk to help them work off energy and improve focus.

Written communication

Adjustments that could help with written communication include:

- software to support with reading or writing – for example, a screen reader or a speech-to-text programme
- talking through written information
- breaking down instructions into clear steps
- using different coloured backgrounds for documents and signs
- having extra time to read information and complete tasks

For example, a construction worker is dyslexic and autistic. They ask for safety signs to be printed on a green background. They find these easier to read and focus on.

Organisation and time management

Adjustments that could help a worker to organise their time include:

- regular check-ins on how work is going
- planners that visually highlight things like deadlines and appointments
- extra reminders
- breaking work up into smaller tasks
- having extra time to plan out work

For example, a worker in a garage is dyspraxic and has ADHD. They use a colour-coded wall planner to help them break down tasks. They have a 10 minute check-in with their boss each morning to go through the plan for the day.

Sensory overload

Sensory overload is when someone feels they cannot cope because their senses are overwhelmed. For example, by loud noises or strong smells.

Adjustments that could help reduce sensory overload include:

- a private, quiet space to go to
- changes to dress codes or uniforms – for example, to allow for softer materials or calmer colours
- noise-cancelling headphones
- computer screen filters to reduce brightness
- having early warning of changes at work and extra time to process them

For example, a teaching assistant in a school is autistic. They are told about changes to the curriculum in advance and given time out of lessons to go over the changes.

Poor balance or co-ordination

Adjustments that could support with poor balance or co-ordination include:

- specialist equipment – for example, a different keyboard or mouse that's easier to use
- organising spaces carefully – for example, avoiding clutter
- signs giving clear directions around the workplace

For example, a worker in an off licence is dyspraxic. They ask for the storeroom to be organised so that nothing is left on the floor. And shelves are arranged so that everything is easy to get to.

Supporting strengths

Employers should explore with neurodivergent workers how they can use their strengths at work.

For example:

- working with clients if someone has strong verbal communication skills
- finding opportunities for creative thinking
- identifying areas of work that particularly interest a worker

It's good practice to take this approach with all workers. Doing this will also support neurodivergent workers who have not shared their condition.

Burnout

Neurodivergent workers are more likely to experience 'burnout' at work. Being burnt out means being extremely tired or exhausted, so you no longer feel able to work.

Burnout can cause increased absence and poor performance. Employers should consider what support can help avoid this. For example, extra breaks or varying types of work.

Failure to make reasonable adjustments

If an employer does not make reasonable adjustments, this could be disability discrimination. This type of disability discrimination is called 'failure to make reasonable adjustments'.

Failing to make reasonable adjustments might

- damage a worker's relationship with their employer
- affect a worker's performance at work

In some circumstances, a worker could feel like they have no choice but to resign. If this is the case, they might consider making a claim for constructive dismissal.

Find out more about:

- [failing to make adjustments](#)
- [constructive dismissal](#)

Mental health support

Neurodivergent workers might experience mental health problems related to their condition.

A lack of support from their employer can make this worse and:

- affect their performance at work
- lead to increased sickness absence

For example, not being able to wear noise-cancelling headphones could cause anxiety for some workers with ADHD.

Employers should consider how to support a worker with any mental health problems, as well as with their condition. Doing this can help improve a worker's performance and productivity.

[Find out more about supporting mental health at work](#)

Reasonable adjustments letter templates

If you're a worker and need reasonable adjustments to help you do your job, you can [use our reasonable adjustments request letter template](#).

If you're an employer and have agreed to make reasonable adjustments for an employee, you can [use our reasonable adjustments confirmation letter template](#).

Contact the Acas helpline

If you have any questions about reasonable adjustments and neurodiversity, you can [contact the Acas helpline](#).