



Managing neurodiversity in the workplace

What is Autism?

Autism is a neurological difference that enables the person to see the world differently

They may:

- Find communicating in another form helpful e.g. emails or texts
- Struggle with unstructured events like meetings
- Notice the noise levels, light and canteen smells more
- Be amazing at noticing detail and finding failures / solutions to systems
- Ask to alter company uniforms due to texture or tightness causing pain
- Not attend or limit their social interaction with the team
- Learn in a different way e.g. by rote or a combination of demo and theory
- Ask for reasonable adjustments for things that seem 'odd' to you but make perfect sense to them
- Have an intense interest or area of expertise you can tap into

What is ADHD?

ADHD is Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and it too allows the person to see the world differently

They may:

- Find it a relief when they can stand up and walk around the office
- Find it difficult not to interrupt or talk 'at' people
- Be the life and soul of the party, warm and easily trust people
- May 'blurt' or say things that might be inappropriate
- Be ideas people, buzzing with enthusiasm for new projects
- Get into trouble for not dealing with low stimulus admin like monitoring annual leave balances or time sheets
- Have a hard time with holding /remembering things in their working memory
- Have lots of energy, which if properly targeted, is a huge asset
- Have a sensitivity to noise, smells and textures

Having a discussion about an employee's neurodiversity

- Conduct in a quiet, plain room if possible
- Give them notice of the start time, end time and reassure them they are not in trouble
- Submit some questions to them beforehand so it doesn't feel like an ambush
- Discuss and agree confidentiality
- Do some digging first, know who you are going to get on board to help
- Be prepared for anything from factual requests to a very emotional response, disclosure is a big deal
- Ask questions, learn what THEIR neurological difference means to them, what strategies do they already employ?
- Try not to draw down on media comparisons e.g. "Oh like Rain man?"
- Agree a timeline of support and **stick to it**.

The hidden curriculum

In your office you will have traditions or a culture that has grown up over time. The hidden curriculum is your office's unwritten rules. Its useful (and sometimes a good team building exercise) to work out what you do and don't like about office traditions, agree them and then write them up.

Benefits:

- New people coming into the office can feel like 'one of the team' quicker
- You can challenge those traditions that have grown old and no one really likes anymore
- It can avoid bad feeling if someone hasn't picked up the nuance
- It gives you the opportunity to develop more up to date and relevant culture

Examples might be:

- How much you contribute to birthday presents?
- Is it ever your turn to buy the birthday present?
- What do you do if you don't like the person whose birthday it is?
- Can you sign the card if you haven't contributed to the present?
- When you make tea, should you make one for everyone?
- Tea fund payment - who, how, when and how much?
- What is 'too early' in the context of arriving, leaving and lunch?
- Friday pub day, pay day bacon butties, Friday pie day, - who? How?
- Socialising and Christmas parties - still relevant? Other alternatives to parties or restaurants?
- Cigarette breaks - how often, is there a designated place?
- Welfare breaks and mobile phones - are there any rules about making calls or taking breaks from the office?