



Tip Sheet



# Performance Conversations

## With Neurodivergent Employees

*A resource for managers on addressing performance concerns in a clear, supportive, and collaborative way.*

**Supporting performance effectively requires clarity, empathy, and a person-centred approach. When concerns arise, it is important to create opportunities for understanding, collaboration, and problem solving rather than assuming intent or attributing challenges solely to a person's neurotype.**

Many of the approaches outlined in this resource represent good management practice for all employees. However, they can be particularly important when supporting neurodivergent employees, who may experience workplace expectations, communication practices, and environments differently.

### What is a performance concern?

Performance concerns may relate to the quality, quantity, or timeliness of work, attendance or punctuality, productivity, following required processes or procedures, workload management, prioritisation, or other role related expectations.



This resource outlines practical strategies for addressing performance concerns with neurodivergent employees in a way that supports understanding, accountability, and success in the workplace.

*This project is proudly funded & supported by:*

**DELIVERING  
FOR QUEENSLAND**



**Queensland  
Government**

### 1

#### Preparation and initial steps

Before addressing any performance concerns, ensure you have a clear understanding of the situation and the necessary resources.

**Review key principles:** Revisit the main ideas of neuro-inclusive management. These include valuing neurodiversity, taking an individualised approach, using clear communication, focusing on observable behaviour, providing structure, and continuing to learn.

**Gather specific evidence:** Identify and document-specific instances of the performance concern, focusing on observable behaviours and measurable outcomes. Avoid subjective interpretations or assumptions about intent.

**Consider potential contributing factors:** Consider if any workplace factors may be contributing to the performance concern before focusing solely on individual performance (e.g. organisational, team, or environmental factors such as unclear expectations, communication breakdowns, competing priorities, workload demands, sensory overload, inadequate resources, or a lack of appropriate workplace adjustments and supports).

**Consider the impact of neurotype where relevant and disclosed:** If an employee has disclosed they are neurodivergent, consider whether characteristics associated with their neurotype may be influencing performance (e.g. some employees may experience differences in attention regulation, executive functioning, organisation, time management, processing information, or managing competing demands). However, experiences vary significantly between individuals and should not be assumed based on a diagnosis alone. The focus should remain on understanding the specific performance concern, its impact, and any supports or adjustments to assist the employee to meet role requirements.

**Consult resources (if available):** If your organisation has a Human Resources (HR) team, neurodiversity specialists, or Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), consult with them for guidance and support in developing an appropriate approach.

## 2

### The performance discussion

Approach the discussion as a collaborative effort to understand and resolve challenges.

**Schedule a dedicated meeting:** Arrange a private and dedicated meeting with the employee. Provide advance notice of the meeting's purpose and, if appropriate, a brief agenda to reduce anxiety.

**Start with clarity and directness:** Begin by clearly stating the purpose of the meeting and the specific performance concern, using objective language and referencing the documented evidence. Avoid ambiguity, idioms, or figures of speech.

**Example:** Instead of saying: "You haven't been pulling your weight."

Say: "I've noticed that the last three reports were submitted after the deadline on [dates]."

**Focus on behaviour and impact:** Describe the specific behaviours observed and their impact on team goals, productivity, or workplace outcomes.

**Example:** "Submitting reports late impacts the team's ability to [specific impact]."

**Seek understanding before reaching conclusions:** Allow the employee ample opportunity to explain their perspective. Practise active listening, ask clarifying questions, and explore any underlying challenges they may be experiencing. Be mindful of potential communication differences and allow for processing time.

**Collaborative problem solving:** Frame the discussion as a collaborative effort to find solutions. Ask for their input on potential strategies for improvement.

**Example:** "What support or adjustments do you think might help you meet the report deadlines consistently?"

Employees may not always know what supports or strategies will be most helpful. Where this is the case, work together to explore options, trial different approaches and review what is effective over time.

**Review expectations and goals:** Reiterate clear expectations and goals, ensuring they are clear, specific, and measurable. Frameworks such as *SMART* (*Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound*) goals may assist where appropriate. Break down larger goals into smaller, manageable steps if necessary.

**Clarify expectations:** If the performance concern relates to workplace expectations that have not been clearly communicated, take time to explain those expectations directly and provide examples where appropriate.

**Discuss potential accommodations and workplace adjustments:** Explore whether any adjustments could support the employee in meeting performance expectations. This might involve changes to their workspace, schedule, communication methods, or task breakdown.

**Develop an action plan:** Collaboratively create a clear and documented action plan outlining specific steps the employee will take to improve performance, the support the manager and organisation will provide, and a timeline for review. Ensure the plan is specific and measurable.

**Recognise strengths and successes:** While addressing areas for improvement, also acknowledge the employee's strengths, successes, and positive contributions to the team. This helps maintain a balanced perspective and reinforces their value.

**Offer resources and support:** Provide information about available resources, such as relevant training, mentoring, employee support services, or workplace resources.

**Schedule follow up and document discussion:** Agree on a specific time to follow up and review progress on the action plan. This demonstrates ongoing support and accountability. Maintain thorough and objective records of the performance discussion, the agreed action plan, and any accommodations discussed.

### 3

#### Ongoing management and support

Effective performance management is an ongoing process requiring consistent effort and adaptability.

**Regular check-ins:** Schedule regular, brief check-ins to monitor progress, provide ongoing support, and address any emerging challenges.

**Consistent feedback:** Provide frequent, constructive feedback, including both positive and developmental feedback, focusing on specific behaviours and their impact. Offer feedback in accessible formats (e.g. written, visual) if preferred.

**Provide positive reinforcement & focus on development:** Frame performance management as an opportunity for growth and development, helping the employee identify and leverage their strengths, and acknowledge and recognise improvements and successes with specific and genuine praise.

**Flexibility and adaptability:** Be prepared to adjust the action plan or accommodations based on the employee's progress and evolving needs.

**Maintain confidentiality:** Respect the employee's privacy regarding their neurodivergence, unless they explicitly consent to share this information.

**By implementing these strategies, managers can approach performance issues with neurodivergent employees supportively and aim to foster their success and contribution within the organisation. A commitment to understanding and adapting traditional practices is key to creating a truly inclusive workplace.**

#### Key takeaways

- ▶ **Observe:** Focus on specific behaviours and their impact using clear, objective evidence rather than assumptions or judgements.
- ▶ **Understand:** Seek to understand the employee's perspective and consider any workplace factors, barriers, support needs or adjustments that may be influencing performance.
- ▶ **Collaborate:** Work together to identify solutions, agree on clear actions and supports, and review progress regularly.

*This project is proudly funded & supported by:*

**DELIVERING  
FOR QUEENSLAND**



**Queensland  
Government**