

Tip Sheet

Setting Clear Expectations & Goals

for Neurodivergent Employees

Setting clear expectations supports everyone and can be especially helpful for employees who prefer predictability, clarity, and structure. A person-centred, strengths-focused approach ensures expectations are communicated in ways that are accessible, meaningful, and supportive of individual working styles.

The following approaches support clear, shared expectations between managers and employees.

1

Use clear and direct language:
Avoid vague phrases or idioms that may be interpreted differently by different people. Be specific about what needs to be completed, by when, and in what format. Clear communication reduces misunderstandings and supports confidence.

2

Provide expectations and goals in more than one format:
Offer key instructions verbally and in writing so the employee can revisit and review the information when needed. Visual tools such as diagrams, brief summaries, or checklists can support understanding for some individuals, depending on their preferences.

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3 **Break tasks into smaller, clearly defined steps:**
Large or open-ended tasks can be easier to manage when they are divided into clear stages with associated timelines. This supports planning and helps the employee understand how to approach the work.

4 **Use structured, concrete goal setting:**
Frameworks such as ***SMART*** goals (***S***pecific, ***M***easurable, ***A***chievable, ***R***elevant, ***T***ime-based) may help clarify priorities, expected outcomes, and measuring success. This also creates transparency around what good performance looks like.

5 **Provide context when outlining tasks:**
Explaining why a task matters, how it fits into the broader workflow, or how it contributes to team goals can support motivation, clarity, and a sense of purpose. Ensure the employee has a shared understanding of priorities, particularly where multiple tasks or competing deadlines are involved.

6 **Offer predictability where possible:**
Consistent routines, clear schedules, and transparent timelines help reduce uncertainty. Communicate meeting times, workflow expectations, and upcoming changes in advance wherever possible.

7 **Support organisation and planning:**
Planning tools such as calendars, digital project management systems, or visual schedules may help employees organise tasks, track deadlines, and monitor progress against agreed goals and expectations. Where appropriate, encourage the use of tools that align with their preferred working style.

8 **Create regular opportunities to check understanding of goals, priorities, and expectations:**
Brief check-ins allow the employee to ask questions, confirm understanding, and seek guidance in a supportive environment. This helps ensure expectations remain clear and aligned. Encourage two-way discussions about expectations rather than assuming understanding based on agreement alone. Exploring how an employee intends to approach a task can provide valuable insight into their understanding of expectations.

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9 **Make implicit expectations explicit:**
Clearly explain expectations that may otherwise be assumed, such as preferred communication practices, turnaround times, meeting participation, escalation processes, and workplace priorities. Avoid relying on employees to infer expectations from context alone.

10 **Provide examples of successful work:**
Concrete models or examples can make expectations clearer, especially when quality or format is important. This provides a shared reference point.

11 **Focus on observable behaviours and outcomes:**
When setting expectations, emphasise clear, measurable actions rather than subjective qualities (e.g. outline specific behaviours that demonstrate effective teamwork or communication).

12 **Review expectations periodically:**
Revisit goals and expectations as tasks or roles evolve. Regular review ensures clarity over time and allows for adjustments that reflect changing needs or responsibilities.

Key takeaways

- Set clear, specific and achievable expectations by using direct language, providing context and making implicit workplace expectations explicit.
- Support understanding by ensuring goals, priorities and expectations are communicated clearly and in accessible formats and creating opportunities for clarification and discussion.
- Review expectations and goals regularly to ensure they remain relevant, achievable and aligned with the employee's role and responsibilities.

Scan QR code for more resources from the Neurodiversity Works toolkit, designed to create inclusive workplaces.

Autism Queensland is here to help—get in touch to learn more:

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