

Tip Sheet

Supporting a Neurodivergent Colleague

Creating an inclusive workplace is everyone's responsibility. While managers may be responsible for workplace adjustments and formal supports, colleagues play an important role in shaping everyday workplace experiences.

What is neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity is the natural variation in how people think, communicate, process information, and experience the world. Within this diversity, some people are neurodivergent (e.g. autistic colleagues or those with ADHD, dyslexia, or Tourette's. These differences are not deficits but variations that come with unique strengths and support needs.

Why your role matters?

A neuroinclusive workplace recognises that colleagues may have different communication styles, sensory preferences, and working patterns, and adjusts expectations accordingly. Supportive interactions can contribute to:

- Psychological safety.
- Inclusion and belonging.
- Respectful workplace relationships.
- Effective teamwork and collaboration.
- A workplace where diverse perspectives are valued.

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Communicate clearly & respectfully

People communicate in different ways. Small adjustments in communication can support understanding and reduce misunderstandings.

- Use clear, direct, and respectful language.
- Avoid relying on implied meanings or vague instructions.
- Be patient if someone needs additional time to process information before responding.
- Recognise that eye contact, tone of voice, or body language may differ from your expectations.
- Be open to different communication methods such as email, messaging, or written information where appropriate.

Avoid assumptions

Everyone's experiences, preferences, and support needs are different.

- Avoid making assumptions about what a person can or cannot do.
- Do not assume someone experiences their neurodivergence in the same way as another person.
- Focus on understanding the individual rather than relying on stereotypes.
- Respect a person's choice about what they do or do not wish to share about themselves.

Support inclusion in everyday interactions

Small everyday actions can make a significant difference to how welcome and included someone feels at work.

- Create opportunities for all team members to contribute during discussions and meetings.
- Be mindful of interrupting or talking over colleagues.
- Share important information clearly and consistently.
- Help make workplace expectations, information, and processes clear and accessible where appropriate.
- Check in with colleagues respectfully and offer support when needed.

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Ask, don't assume

Every person is different. What supports one colleague may be unhelpful for another.

The best approach is respectful curiosity:
"*Is there anything that would help you work at your best?*"

This approach avoids stereotypes and helps create a workplace built on trust and understanding.



Key takeaways

- Communicate respectfully, avoid assumptions, and recognise some people may have different communication styles, preferences and ways of working.
- Be guided by the individual and ask what helps them work at their best, rather than relying on stereotypes or generalisations.
- Help create an inclusive workplace by valuing different perspectives, making space for diverse contributions, and challenging exclusionary behaviour when it occurs.

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:

Email: css@autismqld.com.au
Phone: (07) 3273 0000
Website: autismqld.com.au

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