

Tip Sheet

Supporting an Employee After They Share Their Needs

When a team member chooses to share information about their needs, or neurodivergence, how you respond matters. These conversations can feel vulnerable, and your response will shape the employee's sense of trust, safety, and confidence in the workplace.

This resource outlines respectful, flexible approaches that may support these conversations. They are intended as principles rather than rules and should always be guided by the individual employee's preferences.

Building trust

Express appreciation: Thank your team member for their trust and openness.

> A simple: "*Thank you for sharing this with me. I appreciate your openness, and I want to support you in any way I can*," can make them feel heard and valued.

Practice active listening: Ask open-ended questions to understand their experiences, needs, and preferences. Focus on listening without judgement, allowing them to lead the conversation about what is important to them.

Avoid assumptions: Don't make assumptions about challenges or abilities based on diagnosis or stereotypes. Instead, focus on the individual's expressed preferences of communication style, and ask questions rooted in their individual experience.

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Discuss confidentiality and privacy: Reassure your team member that their conversation will be handled confidentially. Explain who might need to know (e.g. the Human Resources team or other managers involved in accommodations) and explicitly ask for their consent before sharing any information. Transparency builds trust.

Understanding supports: inclusive practices & individual adjustments

Following a conversation with an employee, support may involve a combination of inclusive workplace practices and individual adjustments:

- **Inclusive practices:** Available to everyone and help reduce barriers across the workplace.
- **Individual adjustments:** Tailored to the employee's specific needs and are usually developed collaboratively.



Focus on needs, not the diagnosis

When considering supports, focus on understanding the employee's individual needs rather than relying on assumptions associated with a diagnosis. While a diagnosis may provide useful context, it does not determine what supports will be most helpful. There is no one-size-fits-all approach. Effective supports should be identified collaboratively and tailored to the individual, their role, and their work environment.

Examples inclusive practices:

- Clear written instructions alongside verbal communication.
- Meeting agendas and written summaries.
- Multiple communication methods.
- Predictable routines & processes.
- Flexible approaches to communication & participation.

Examples individual adjustments:

- Flexible work arrangements.
- Access to quiet workspaces.
- Adjustments to sensory environments.
- Assistive technology.
- Adjustments to workload, scheduling, or task design where appropriate.

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Ongoing support & flexibility

Creating a supportive environment for neurodivergent employees is an ongoing process. Needs may change over time, so maintaining open communication and offering flexibility is crucial.

- **Regular check-ins:** Allow employees to discuss any challenges they're facing and explore potential adjustments to their accommodations.
- **Offer resources:** Be prepared to provide information about internal or external resources that might be helpful to the employee, such as Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), neurodiversity support groups, or relevant websites.
- **Review existing policies:** Familiarise yourself with your organisation's policies on disability inclusion and workplace adjustments to ensure consistency and fairness.
- **Be patient:** The process of identifying and implementing effective adjustments may take time and some trial and error. Be patient and flexible throughout this process.
- **Document agreed supports and adjustments:** Discuss and document any agreed supports, adjustments and next steps to ensure clarity and consistency. Be transparent about what will be documented, how the information will be used and who may need access to it. Where organisational processes require documentation, ensure the employee is informed and involved throughout the process.
- **Signpost to HR:** While you are often the initial point of contact, ensure the employee knows that HR is also a resource for support and formal workplace adjustment processes.

By fostering a culture of ongoing support and flexibility, we can ensure that all employees feel valued, empowered, and able to reach their full potential in the workplace.

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Key takeaways

- Respond with appreciation, curiosity and respect, and allow the employee to guide the conversation about what is important to them.
- Focus on understanding the individual's needs and preferences rather than making assumptions based on a diagnosis or label.
- Work collaboratively to identify supports, maintain confidentiality and review arrangements over time to ensure they remain effective.



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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