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Understanding Neurodiversity



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Neurodiversity is a term that is used to describe differences in the way people's brains work

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Every individual is different, and have varying levels of capability, but around six out of seven people in the UK tend to take in, process, and communicate information in a similar way. This average person can be described as neurotypical.

Around one in seven in the UK are neurodivergent, meaning that the brain functions, learns, and processes information and sensory stimulus differently to a neurotypical person.

Neurodiversity Conditions

Neurodiversity covers a range of conditions, including:

ASC (Autism Spectrum Condition):
A neurodevelopmental disorder including Autism Spectrum Disorder, Pathological Demand Avoidance, and Asperger's. Affects social interaction and understanding; sensitivity to stimulus like sound or touch; can cause anxiety; difficulty with change; highly focused interests.

ADHD and ADD:
A neurodevelopmental disorder categorised by inattentiveness, hyperactivity and impulsiveness.

Dyslexia:
A learning difficulty causing problems with reading, writing and/or maths.

Dyscalculia:
A learning difficult with numbers and maths concepts.

Dyspraxia:
Also known as Developmental Co-ordination Disorder, affecting movement and co-ordination.

Tourette's Syndrome:
A neurodevelopmental disorder causing involuntary tics, which are repetitive movements and/or sounds.

These descriptions are very brief but each of these conditions are complex and affects people in different ways, with many different symptoms ranging from mild to severe. Support and adjustments at work can depend on your individual needs. Many neurodivergent people have more than one condition. These conditions can be lifelong and may impact daily life, which is why they're often considered as a disability.

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Neurodiversity Myths

There are many misconceptions about neurodiversity, which often don't help perceptions, so it's important to understand and debunk these common myths with the truths:

- It's not rare - one in seven is quite a few people.
- It's not an illness or a mental health condition.
- It's not a learning disability.
- It doesn't only affect males.
- It doesn't imply low or super high intelligence.
- It's not new or a fad—we're just understanding it better now.
- It doesn't usually stop people from leading full, successful lives, though it can make things more challenging.

The Social Model

Being neurodivergent isn't the issue; the problem is environments that assume everyone learns and works the same way. There's nothing wrong with being neurodivergent, and there can be benefits to thinking differently. Instead of trying to change the person, you should adjust environments to be more inclusive, allowing everyone to play to their strengths. This is known as the social model. Often, understanding, flexibility, and small changes can make a big difference.

Here are some tips that can be implemented to support:

Supporting neurodivergent employees can be crucial for their success in both daily life and work. Providing information about neurodiversity encourages awareness, respect, and flexibility. Here's how you can help your team:

1. **Learn more about neurodiversity:** Educate yourself and your employees to understand what neurodiversity looks like in an individual.

2. **Treat everyone with respect:** Recognise and value diverse perspectives.

3. **Be flexible:** Adapt to different needs and preferences.

4. **Communicate effectively:** Ask team members how they prefer to communicate and share information. Some may be okay with direct instructions, while others may prefer meetings to focus on individual tasks and take notes.

5. **Be considerate in shared spaces:** If someone is having a meeting at their desk, be mindful when talking to nearby colleagues to avoid noisy distractions.

6. **Don't make assumptions:** Everyone's experiences and needs are different.

7. **Be kind:** Show empathy and support.

8. **Check in on your team:** For managers, regularly check in on your team's wellbeing. Use a wellness action plan for neurodivergent team members and ask HR for guidance on any adjustments that can be made.

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By supporting your neurodivergent employees, you can help them succeed in their daily and working lives and create an environment where everyone thrives.

More Information and resources on neurodiversity visit the websites below:

ADHD Foundation – The Neurodiversity Charity

Society for Neurodiversity

British Dyslexia Association

National Autistic Society

Mind: ADHD and mental health

Mind: Autism and mental health

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