

SHAPING the future with VOLUNTEERING

How to be more
accessible for
**neurodivergent
people**



How to be more accessible for neurodivergent people

Neurodiversity refers to the natural differences in the way our brains work. It's an umbrella term used to describe these variations. It encompasses the idea that these differences are part of normal variation in the human population. They aren't problems that need to be fixed or cured.



Someone is Neurodivergent if their brain functions differently to what is considered typical. If someone isn't **Neurodivergent**, then they are **neurotypical**.




An environment where there are both neurodivergent and neurotypical people is **neurodiverse**.

Some common conditions a neurodivergent person can have include:

- ❖ Autism
- ❖ Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).
- ❖ Dyscalculia
- ❖ Dysgraphia
- ❖ Dyslexia
- ❖ Dyspraxia
- ❖ Mental health impairments like bi-polar disorder
- ❖ Tourette's and tick disorders

Often, when we think about neurodivergence, we think about the difficulties that people may have. This can help us to remove or reduce the **barriers** they may experience and be more inclusive. However, it's also equally important we acknowledge **their strengths**. We must remember that no two neurodivergent people are the same. They will have **different** strengths, goals and access requirements. It's also important to realise that neurodivergence doesn't define someone, but it can be an important part of their **identity**.

Positive Communication

| Be Flexible with communication methods | |
|---|--|
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ Not everyone communicates best in the same way.❖ Offer multiple communication methods. |
| Avoid too much information | |
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ Too much information can be overwhelming for some.❖ Keep communication (especially about a task) simple, to the point and easy to understand.❖ Offer one way of doing things. You can let someone know if this doesn't work there are other ways. |
| Allow for extra processing time | |
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ Some people need a little longer to process information or respond to a question.❖ Avoid firing question after question if someone doesn't respond.❖ Avoid asking two questions at the same time, such as "what's your name and where are you from"? |

Be careful with banter



- ❖ Banter can be fun but is confusing for some people.
- ❖ Some find it difficult to tell sarcasm or humour from genuine facts. They may miss tone or respond to the literal meaning.
- ❖ Be as literal as possible and explain meaning when you need to.
- ❖ Be respectful if someone has misunderstood a joke.

Don't rely on non-verbal clues



- ❖ Some people struggle to interpret facial expressions and body language.
- ❖ This can be especially true, if one person is neurodivergent and the other neurotypical.

Be flexible

To be inclusive, it's important that managers and volunteer coordinators are willing to be **person-centric**, valuing each team member as an individual and adapting their management styles to fit their needs. Be open to different working arrangements and **focus on the outcomes** rather than how or where people work. It could be that you have a hot-desking policy, but someone finds that challenging. A reasonable adjustment may be that you allow someone to book a particular desk or have their own. Remember, what works for one person, won't necessarily work for another.

The physical environment

Sensory overload can happen when one of the body's senses are **overstimulated**, leading to a feeling of being overwhelmed and unable to process information. The threshold for sensory overload is often much lower for neurodivergent people making some environments problematic. We need to remember that the sensory experiences of neurodivergent people are incredibly **diverse**, with needs that sometimes conflict with each other. This means there is no such thing as a one size fits all accessible environment. Spaces need to as much as possible **offer choice**. Some common challenges are:

Noise: Busy spaces with lots of noise can be problematic. Open plan layouts which have zones for a variety of functions, make noise levels unpredictable. This can be particularly challenging. Sound proofing screens, quiet rooms and allowing the use of headphones can all be helpful.

Bright Colours: Choosing appropriate colours to use in your space is vital. Colours which work well on logos do not necessarily translate into accessible and comfortable colour schemes. Avoid using bright colours and bold artwork in areas where focus is required. Light blues and greens tend to work well.

Lighting: Harsh fluorescent lighting can be uncomfortable for many neurodiverse individuals, contributing to headaches and visual discomfort. Where possible make the most of natural light and include soft diffused light sources.

Untidiness and clutter: Simple, tidy, and clutter-free offices can increase productivity, focus and efficiency for all your team. They make it easier for people to navigate, find things and concentrate.

Smells: Strong perfumes, cleaning products or even a workmate's lunch can be overwhelming for some. Try to minimise strong smells where possible.

Materials: Some people may have tactile sensitivities and find certain materials uncomfortable. Having a variety of chairs available for people to sit on that are covered in different materials can be good practice.

Assistive Technology



Assistive technology can be a game changer for neurodivergent people. Employers should stay informed about available technologies and think about how these can be implemented in the workplace.

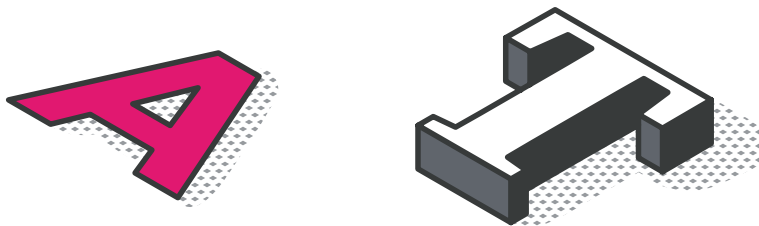
Workplace/volunteering needs assessments are often overlooked for neurodivergent people but can be helpful to identify useful assistive technology (as well as other support).

A workplace volunteering needs assessment is a tool used to identify the reasonable adjustments someone may require in the workplace or volunteering.

Digital accessibility

To be accessible, websites and other digital content should be **consistent** and **predictable**. Giving the user as much **control** as possible is one of the key principles of accessibility especially for neurodivergent people. Users should be able to:

- ❖ Control the audio – Ideally avoid having automatically played audio and allow someone to **easily pause** audio when necessary.
- ❖ Adjust time limits – Some people may need a little longer to perform actions. Avoid situations where a user is **timed out** when they are in the middle of something. Allow someone to easily extend the time available if necessary.
- ❖ Pause – Items such as rotating photo **carousels** can be really distracting for many. Allow people to pause or stop them.
- ❖ Be supported to avoid and correct mistakes – providing **clear instructions** and having mechanisms in place to automatically pick up and highlight **potential mistakes**, such as incorrectly formatted phone numbers.



The design of a page can also be important. Other ways to be more accessible include:

- ❖ Simple and easy to read fonts should be used. **Sans serif** fonts tend to be easier to understand. It's important to **avoid underlined** and **italicised** text too.
- ❖ Keep the page **simple** and **uncluttered**. Ensure there is plenty of white space.
- ❖ Use **headings** to allow people to easily find the information they need.
- ❖ Include **images** and **bullet points**.
- ❖ **Left aligned** text is easier for many to read.
- ❖ Use plain English.

Sans serif fonts do not have small projections at the end of letters. Common sans serif fonts are Arial, Helvetica and Verdana.