



**Flourish**

Celebrating Diversity

# Neurodiversity at Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals



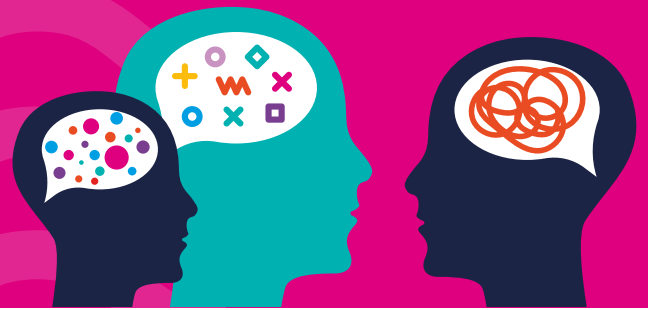
## How to better support our neurodiverse colleagues



**Flourish**  
at Newcastle Hospitals



The Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals  
NHS Foundation Trust



# Neurodiversity at Newcastle Hospitals

## How to better support our neurodiverse colleagues

**The term neurodiversity refers to the way that everyone's brains naturally work differently from one another. Just as you may be born right-handed or have green eyes, how your brain works and where you sit on the cognitive spectrum will be unique to you. The majority of people are neurotypical, this means they think and behave in a way that is similar to most other people.**

Around one in seven people are neurodivergent. This means they behave, think, process and interpret information in ways that differ to most other people.

People who are neurodiverse often think about and see the world differently, making them a huge asset to any team that wants to improve how they do things and deliver excellent patient care or services. Neurodiversity therefore isn't something to be "fixed" but understood and celebrated.

However, traditional working practises are often designed with a neurotypical society in mind and this can mean that neurodivergent people spend a lot of time and energy trying to fit in with their work environment. This can make it difficult for neurodivergent employees to thrive at work.

Based on national data we estimate that

**2,571** of our **18,000\*** staff are **neurodiverse**

this will include those who have not received a diagnosis and those who haven't declared their diagnosis.

\* This number includes bank staff

In collaboration the Disability Staff Network and the equality, diversity and inclusion team here at Newcastle Hospitals have developed this guide to help you improve your understanding of the most common types of neurodiversity and learn how to better communicate and support our neurodiverse colleagues.



**DISABILITY**  
STAFF NETWORK

# The Legal Bit



**It's important to note that the extent to which someone's neurodivergence affects them can vary. But for some, it may be regarded as a disability under the Equality Act 2010. Therefore we have a responsibility to make any reasonable adjustments to support and enable neurodivergent employees at work.**

A helpful tool to assist in this is our **Health & Wellbeing Passport** – this document gives

individuals and their manager the opportunity to discuss and agree person-specific actions that enable people to thrive in their role. The Disability Staff Network have a wealth of lived experience which can help support individuals through their journey and can also offer advice to managers who want to create equity within their teams.

## What you need to know

Most common types of neurodiversity:

### Autism

or Autism Spectrum Conditions



### ADHD

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, or ADD: Attention Deficit Disorder

### Dyscalculia

a condition that affects the ability to acquire arithmetical skills



### Dyslexia

difficulty processing and remembering information

### Dyspraxia

or Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD)

# ADHD

It's estimated that more than **3 in 100 adults** have ADHD.

Source: Neurodiversity at work.  
Chartered Institute of Personal Development.  
[www.cipd.co.uk](http://www.cipd.co.uk), published February 2018.



## ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder)

### Strengths

**Hyper-focus:** Individuals with ADHD often experience hyper-focus, driven by their interests. This means they're often able to focus on tasks with deep concentration and energetic drive.

**Resilience:** People with ADHD excel at pushing past setbacks, adapting new strategies and moving forward.

**Pro-activeness:** Those with ADHD are often proactive and have the ability to work well under pressure and can be great at gauging other people and adjusting their personal approach.

### Potential challenges

People with ADHD may also find that they have some of these other traits:

- Fidget, doodle or do something with their hands to help maintain concentration.
- Can be impulsive and act without fully considering the consequences.
- Jump from one thought or activity to another.
- Struggle with attention to detail if their brain isn't motivated by the task. Alternatively they can get lost in their own world.

### Some considerations

#### People with ADHD

- May need work that will hold their attention and keep their dopamine levels up.
- Can be great at breaking down complex processes into step by step, easily understood guides with diagrams, or translating technical language into something that everyone finds easier to use.
- Can mask their need to fidget and move around when at work – this can be very draining.
- ADHD often goes hand in hand with anxiety or depression.
- May have run through a conversation in their head a few times before they actually speak it out loud, so don't be embarrassed to ask them for the context.
- Might be more sensitive to what could be perceived as rejection, such as negative feedback.



# Autism

1 in 100 people are on the autistic spectrum and there are around 700,000 autistic adults & children in the UK.

Source: Neurodiversity at work.  
Chartered Institute of Personal Development.  
[www.cipd.co.uk](http://www.cipd.co.uk), published February 2018.



## Autism

### Strengths

**Concentration:** People with autism have the ability to focus intensely on a given task, especially if they have a special interest in the subject. Their passion and enthusiasm can lead them to hold a high level of expertise in their chosen field.

**Creativity:** A new study has found that people with autistic traits excel in coming up with exceptionally creative ideas. With superb attention to detail, such creativity can lead to great problem-solving that is innovative and different.

**Reliability:** Routine and structure is important to people with autism. It helps make the world less confusing. Therefore, autistic individuals are often very punctual.

### Potential challenges

Autistic people may also find that they have some of these other traits:

- Have difficulty interpreting the behaviour and intentions of other people, building relationships or keeping a conversation going.
- Have limited interests and show a tendency towards compulsive or repetitive behaviours.
- Dislike changes to routine.
- Find talking about emotions difficult.

### Some considerations

#### Autistic people

- Can have excellent attention to detail, often picking out things that others have missed.
- Sometimes what an autistic person does might look odd, but that doesn't mean they are not working to the same standard as everyone else – they just do things in a different way.
- Dealing with people can take a lot of energy for autistic people and can make them feel stressed and worn out.
- When things are overwhelming they might shut down, avoid interaction or appear stand-offish.
- Can experience 'meltdowns' which occur due to extreme distress. If an autistic person has a meltdown, it indicates that they have been put in one or more situations that caused them distress, were unable to escape, and signs of their distress were not addressed in time
- Many autistics feel they have to be a different person at work, 'masking' who and how they really are. This can cause autistic fatigue and burnout

# Dyscalculia

1 in 20 people have dyscalculia and 50% of those people also have dyslexia.

Source: Neurodiversity at work. CPD Online College, [www.cpdonline.co.uk](http://www.cpdonline.co.uk) 06/01/2022.

## Dyscalculia

### Strengths

**Creativity:** often paired with artistic talent.

**A love of words:** Often with excellent spelling, punctuation and grammar, fantastic at writing reports.

**Strong strategic thinking:** Great at forward thinking and can see things coming. Able to prepare and be one step ahead.

**Intuitive thinking:** People with Dyscalculia describe having almost a sixth sense of being able to just look at a patient and know they're not ok, or knowing someone is upset or really unwell.

**Great organisational skills:** Able to have great ideas about how to make things easier, not just for themselves but for everyone.

### Potential challenges

People with dyscalculia may also find that they have some of these other traits:

- Find it difficult to do mathematical equations or to retain numerical information such as reading timetables, making appointments.
- Have a lack of confidence with numbers.
- Find it difficult to give or follow directions – but can walk with someone to the right place.

### Some considerations

#### People with Dyscalculia

- Learn better by doing and copying someone rather than by theory.
- Are often really approachable and people feel comfortable going to them for help or advice.
- Find pushing for improvements in areas of weakness can be hugely stressful and damaging to confidence for people with dyscalculia.



# Dyslexia

Source: Neurodiversity at work.  
Chartered Institute of Personal Development.  
[www.cipd.co.uk](http://www.cipd.co.uk), published February 2018.

1 in 10 people  
in the UK are  
thought to  
be dyslexic.



## Dyslexia

### Strengths

**Connecting ideas:** Those with dyslexia have the ability to appreciate the big picture. This can make it easier to spot patterns and see trends in data.

**Thinking outside the box:** Excelling at problem solving, people with dyslexia may take different approaches to an issue or discover connections that others have missed. They can be skilled inventors and original thinkers as they are especially good at bringing together information and resources from different disciplines.

**Creativity:** Dyslexics are more likely to think in images. Their brains are skilled in visual processing and can consider objects from a greater number of angles.

### Potential challenges

People with dyslexia may also find that they may have some of these other traits:

- Spell or read words incorrectly, or don't identify when something has been autocorrected to a different word.
- Sometimes struggle to think of the right words to say or write to express themselves.
- Find it difficult to take in lots of instructions without breaking it down.
- Lack confidence in their abilities, especially anything perceived to be academic.

### Some considerations

#### People with dyslexia

- Often put in lots more hours than their colleagues to make sure their work is of the same standard.
- Many dyslexics struggled at school and, depending on their age, received varying levels of support. Some people may feel they are missing the basics that others learnt at a young age and have work-arounds or coping strategies.
- May not have been diagnosed until much later in adulthood.
- There can still be stigma attached to being dyslexic and not spelling words correctly, especially working at a more senior level. Sometimes people feel it's easier to pretend they're not dyslexic.
- Could need more time to be able to complete assignments if undertaking any study or educational programme.
- The way dyslexia presents can fluctuate from day to day.



# Dyspraxia (or DCD)

At least **1 in 17**  
people are thought  
to be dyspraxic.

Source: Neurodiversity at work.  
Chartered Institute of Personal Development.  
[www.cipd.co.uk](http://www.cipd.co.uk), published February 2018.



## Dyspraxia

### Strengths

**Awareness of others:** People with dyspraxia often have a strong sense of empathy and a good awareness of others. That makes them great team members.

**Motivation:** Individuals with dyspraxia often have high motivation and a determination to succeed. That means they can thrive when completing individual tasks.

**Innovation:** Those with dyspraxia are often holistic and strategic thinkers. They have very complex minds that excel at innovation and problem-solving.

### Potential challenges

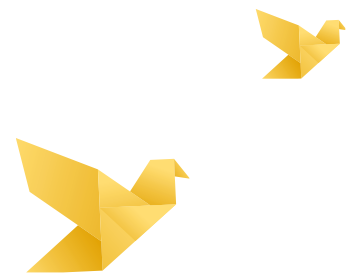
People with Dyspraxia or DCD may also find that they have some of these other traits:

- Find it difficult to plan work to meet deadlines.
- Work more slowly as a result of challenges with motor skills.
- Struggle with some physical tasks or activities such as driving, hospital corners when making beds or writing.

### Some considerations

#### People with Dyspraxia

- Have likely developed strategies to compensate for difficulties with planning and organisation so that deadlines are still met and performance is of a high level.
- Wearing headphones or listening to music can help with concentration, particularly in environments that are busy and noisy.
- Often work harder or longer hours than their colleagues to ensure their work is of a high standard.
- May do things differently to how others do them, but the outcome is the same.





# What our staff say...

## Top Tips

Don't think we're being rude if we ask **'why' repeatedly**. You may have explained sufficiently, but we may still not understand. Our natural position is to ask 'why' until either we're satisfied that we understand, or we're convinced that you do.

Picking up the phone can be hard, especially if it's not a pre-arranged phone call and we don't know what it's about.

If you want our input, **ask us for it directly**, but make sure we know that we don't have to give it immediately.

When we're in a new situation, we may look to you for **social cues**. This could include situations we have been in with other people, but not with you. An example of this is that we may always say 'have a good weekend' to the colleagues who we work with every day because we've seen you do it, but we may not know whether that's an appropriate thing to say to a manager who is leaving their office.

Sometimes diagrams are better than written communications or instructions.

We may not ask things directly and can be extremely subtle (because we don't want to be too direct and upset anyone!).

**We prefer to be told straight if we've upset someone so we can resolve it rather than being left guessing.**

The inability to focus on a single thing is normal - if there are two conversations going on, someone who is neurodiverse might involuntarily dip in and out of both and therefore follow neither.

# What our staff say...

## More Top Tips

**We all not all the same** - If you've met one autistic you've met one autistic! We are all different and what works well for one person may be the worst thing ever for someone else - please don't make assumptions based on your own neurotypical experiences with other autistics.

Try to avoid using jokes, sarcasm or ambiguous statements.

We can experience the same thing but completely differently to you. We experience the whole world differently. **Just because something isn't too loud for you, doesn't mean that it isn't painfully loud to us.** You may not be able to understand how we can experience that thing as overwhelmingly loud; we don't understand how you can't!

**Deadlines (and even interim deadlines) can be fantastic** to make sure we stay on task and don't spend too long on perfecting something, which we may later have to change **HOWEVER** for some of us, deadlines may cause undue stress, making a neurodiverse person concentrate more on the lack of time available and less on the task.

Where there are organisational changes, managers should ensure that **neurodiverse colleagues are included** in the plans specifically affecting their work and that they are regularly kept up-to-date with progress.

We can be blunt and may miss subtle hints.

Please ask us what helps and what doesn't and take what we say seriously.

**Sensory issues are worse when we are stressed**, though whether heightened or lowered is not consistent either.

Be clear and direct, using concise sentences and instructions.

Our responses to the same situation can change dependent on what sort of day we are having. Our tolerances vary from day to day, depending on what else we have had to deal with - please don't be confused if you see us manage a situation one day, but struggle the next, you don't know what else we have already had to cope with that day.

**Always tell us 'why'**. We are unlikely to do something if we don't know why we're doing it.

If we have had to 'mask' a meltdown we will feel even more drained and our recovery time will be longer.

We may not be able to concentrate on more than one thing at a time - if you approach and speak to someone on task, they may not hear what you're saying even if they appear to be paying attention.

Try to use email - we may forget much of what was spoken, even if we said it, so having something to refer back to is fantastic.

Use short sentences in written communications.

A 'safe' phrase with a manager to let them know, confidentially, that you are headed for a meltdown.

If you notice that someone is **anxious**, offer them a way out - otherwise they may force themselves to remain in the situation, which can be overwhelming. The time frame within which this needs to be done varies according to the person and situation.

Routine can be calming and may be used by a person to calm themselves - trying to convince someone to skip part of their routine to save time can actually cost time in the long run.

Where appropriate, use closed rather than open questions.

Never ask for a chat about something tomorrow (or another day) without outlining what the chat is about - we may spend time obsessing over worst case scenarios.

Observe 'tells' and change your behaviour accordingly - this could be tapping fingertip to thumb, rubbing finger on forehead or many other 'stims'.

# 6 Tips for Managers



1.

## Get to know the individual

Try to learn more about your team member's neurodivergence so that you can best support them. But remember, even though there are some behaviours or characteristics that are common to neurodivergent conditions, it's important not to make any assumptions as these will vary from person-to-person.

**While one person with ADHD might struggle to concentrate, another might not.**

Likewise, while one person with autism might be very good with numbers, another might not. Try not to create any stereotypes and avoid unconscious bias. Get to know the person and find out how you can best support their unique characteristics, strengths and challenges and get the most from them.

2.

## Provide supportive technology and equipment

Assistive technology and equipment may help some neurodivergent people to carry out their role. For example, some people with dyspraxia might experience difficulties with their motor coordination which can make using office equipment like a keyboard, mouse or printer difficult.

Some things you can invest in that might help neurodivergent employees to feel more comfortable at work include: speech-to-text, text-to-speech or mind-mapping software, dictation tools, a digital recorder, a daily planner, a screen overlay or dual-screens.

Access to Work is a great scheme run by the government that can help cover the costs of additional equipment.

**Access to Work: get support if you have a disability or health condition: What Access to Work is - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk))**

A personalised plan of action can help support neurodivergent individuals in the workplace. It's important that this is led by the person themselves, but only if they feel comfortable doing so, as they are the expert on their own needs.

**Consider using the Health and Wellbeing Passport to achieve this.**



### 3. Communicate clearly

Some neurodivergent employees may communicate in different ways to neurotypical people. For example, people with autism might not find it easy to read facial expressions or interpret your tone of voice and may take what you say literally. They may not understand things like sarcasm or metaphors, or how to filter out less important information.

**So try to use **direct language** and say exactly what you mean.**

Ask specific questions, structure your instructions, avoid using jargon and allow enough time to process what you're saying. It might also help to make sure you provide communications materials in a range of formats. For example, clearly documenting training materials and instructions in audio and visual formats may work better for someone with dyslexia than traditional written materials.

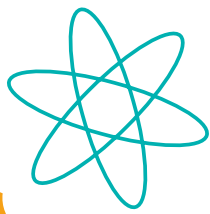


### 4. Consider how you assign tasks

Try to think about the type of work, tasks and routines that will work best for the individual. For example, some people with ADHD may find static or repetitive work challenging. So, they might work best in a diverse role, where they can take regular breaks or work flexible hours. Consider giving people jobs that play to their strengths. As with all team members, make sure to monitor workload to stop anyone feeling overloaded, stressed or under pressure at work.

**Be open to doing things a different way as often our **neurodiverse colleagues** can suggest different methods that can streamline processes or increase effectiveness.**





5.

## Consider the physical environment

Traditional workspaces are often designed with the needs of a neurotypical society in mind. But bright lighting, lots of noise and interruptions in a busy office may feel overstimulating for some neurodivergent employees. If your employee finds this challenging, you could try investing in adjustable lighting or desk lamps, noise cancelling headphones, using partitions and room dividers, providing standing desks or allowing individuals to work from home at times.

**It might also help to have specific quiet zones that are available for all employees to use when they need.**

This can help to create a supportive space while preventing neurodivergent individuals from feeling singled out.

6.

## Be understanding and empathetic

It's important to be understanding and approachable so that your staff feel they can come and talk to you and ask for help if they need it. But don't put any pressure on them to open up if they don't want to. Make sure you arrange regular 1:1s in a confidential space so you can check-in and see how they're doing and whether you need to make any adjustments to their working practices. Review these regularly to make sure they're working.

**But remember to always ask for the individual's approval before making any adjustments or making their neurodiversity wider knowledge.**

It may also help to discuss coaching and mentoring for any personal development point they'd like help with, such as time-management or organisation.





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