

# AFRY's Guide to Neurodiversity



At AFRY we know that raising awareness is an important first step to make a difference. A neurodiversity guide is a proactive step towards building an inclusive workplace for all employees.

The aim of the Neurodiversity guide is to provide information, awareness, and guidance to understand and include neurodiverse people.

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# What is Neurodiversity?

## Neurodiversity in a nutshell

Neurodiversity describes the idea that people experience and interact with the world around them in many ways; **there is no one “right” way of thinking, learning, and behaving, and differences are not viewed as deficits.**

The word “neurodiversity” refers to the cognitive and neurological diversity of all people. It is an umbrella term used to describe a number of these variations. You probably have heard about different forms of neurodivergence such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), ADHD or learning difficulties (e.g., dyslexia). Types of neurodivergence include:

Attention Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)	Cognitive functioning difficulties or executive dysfunction
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)	Dysgraphia
Dyscalculia	Misophonia
Dyslexia	Social Communication Disorder (SCD)
Dyspraxia (or developmental coordination disorder, DCD)	Tourette’s syndrome
Highly Sensitive Person (HSP)	Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
	Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD)

Someone who is neurodivergent behaves, thinks and learns differently compared to those who are neurotypical. What “typical” brain function means is determined by the cultural context, social relationships, environmental factors, and even other people’s perceptions.

### So, is there an actual norm?

Neurodiversity is a concept that emphasises the natural variation in neurological traits and considers **neurological differences as part of the normal spectrum of human diversity.** Everyone’s experience is unique, and embracing neurodiversity involves recognising and accommodating these differences in a positive and inclusive manner.

It means that everyone has a unique brain and therefore different skills, abilities, and needs.

## Why are we raising awareness?

An inclusive workplace is not just a moral imperative but a strategic advantage. **Embracing neurodiversity unlocks a myriad of talents, skills, and perspectives that contribute to innovation and organisational success.** Why? Because neurodivergent people have a lot of unique skills that are an asset for any company.





# Debunking myths about neurodiversity

## Myth 1

- ⊗ All neurodiverse individuals are alike.
- ☑ Neurodiversity is a spectrum with diverse abilities, strengths, and challenges. Avoid assumptions and appreciate each person's unique qualities. Just as all neurotypical individuals are not alike, the same goes for neurodiverse individuals.

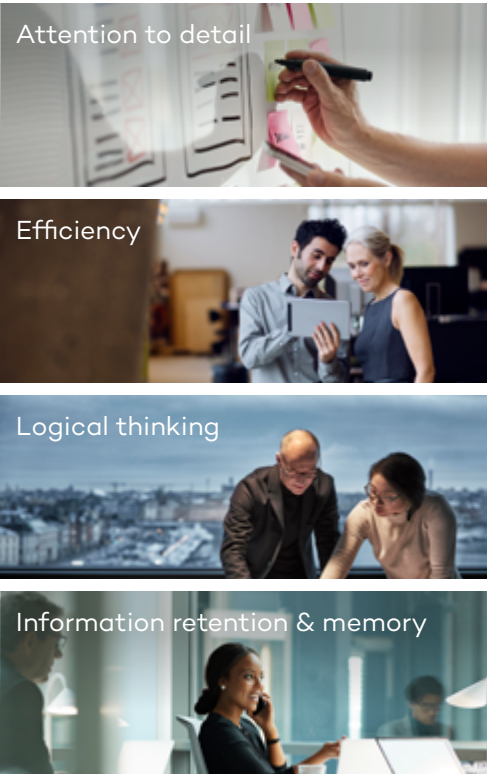
## Myth 2

- ⊗ Success in the workplace isn't attainable for neurodiverse employees.
- ☑ Neurodiverse individuals bring innovation, creativity, technical prowess, problem-solving skills, and high accuracy to the workplace. They contribute significantly to an organization's success. For example,

### Common ADHD strengths:



### Common Autistic strengths:



However, workplace environment or rigid expectations often make it harder for neurodiverse people to succeed.

## Myth 3

- ⊗ Neurodiversity is a mental health condition.
- ☑ Neurodiversity is distinct from mental health conditions, though they may coexist. Employers must provide support to ensure the mental well-being of their neurodiverse workforce.

While neurodivergent people may face their own, specific challenges in the workplace environment, or with tasks, they can bring unique and valuable strengths to their work.



Source: <https://cipd.org>





## How can you as a leader make a difference?

Acting as a leader for neurodiverse employees involves creating an inclusive and supportive environment that values diverse perspectives and ensures equal opportunities for everyone. Here are some key strategies:

### Educate Yourself

Take the time to educate yourself about neurodiversity and the specific challenges and strengths associated with different neurodivergence types.

### Promote Awareness

Foster awareness and understanding of neurodiversity within your team and the broader organisation (training sessions, workshops, or informational resources).

### Create an Inclusive Culture

Foster a culture of inclusivity where neurodiversity is embraced and valued. Encourage open dialogue, dispel myths, and emphasise the strengths that neurodivergent individuals bring to the team. Ensure that neurodivergent employees have equal opportunities for career growth and advancement.

#### Possible practical steps:

- **organize events** like panel discussions or round tables, featuring neurodivergent employees sharing their experiences;
- arrange a **feedback** session with your team, especially with neurodiverse employees, and **initiate discussion** about how you as a manager can make their work easier and more enjoyable;
- create space for sharing **success stories** of neurodiverse employees.

### Flexible Work Arrangements

Consider flexible work arrangements that accommodate neurodivergent individuals' needs. This may involve providing options for remote work, flexible hours, or customised workspaces.

### Regular Check-ins

Conduct regular check-ins with neurodivergent employees to assess their well-being, job satisfaction, and any additional support they may need. This shows a commitment to their success and inclusion. Don't forget that this recommendation is applicable to all employees!



# Navigating Neurodiversity in the Workplace: Practical Do's and Don'ts

## Use Inclusive Language



**Do:** Replace exclusive terms like “normal” or “typical” with inclusive alternatives such as “neurotypical.”

**Do:** Replace exclusive terms like “abnormal” with inclusive alternatives such as “neurodivergent, neurodiverse”.

**Do:** Ask how an individual would like to be described to avoid stereotyping or negative connotations.



**Don't:** Use terms like “condition”, “disorder”, “disease”, “high-functioning” or “low-functioning”; they oversimplify and stigmatize.

**Don't:** Make casual jokes about neurodivergent traits or behaviours.

**Don't:** Describe a person who is neurodivergent as ‘inspirational’ or ‘brave’. These words are patronising and insinuate that they are somehow different in a negative way.

**Don't:** Mention a person’s neurodivergence at all if it isn’t relevant.

## Promote Flexible and Inclusive environment



**Do:** Encourage neurodiverse employees to communicate via their preferred method (email, chat, in-person).

**Do:** Establish clear communication guidelines and provide written instructions to complement verbal ones.

**Do:** Initiate conversations with neurodivergent individuals, allowing them to share their experiences, e.g. “Can you share your experience to help me understand better?”.



**Don't stereotype** individuals based on diagnostic labels; treat each person as an individual.

**Don't exclude** neurodiverse employees from training opportunities based on assumptions.

**Don't assume** a neurodivergent employee isn't interested in career progression without discussing their goals.

**Don't presume** a person needs help and support, presume competence instead.





## Support and Mental Health Resources

At AFRY employee wellbeing is the heart of everything we do. Within AFRY, we have just started our neurodiverse journey and we have a lot to learn within this area, our biggest priority is to create accessible mental health resources for neurodivergent employees, and we are encouraging an open dialogue about mental health in the workplace. At AFRY you can be yourself.

Establish Neurodiversity Employee Resource Groups:

- Support the creation of Neurodiversity Employee Resource Groups within the organization. These groups can provide a platform for mutual support, shared experiences, and advocacy.







Read more in AFRYs [Inclusive recruitment Guide](#) and [Unconscious Bias Guide](#)

AFRYs [Inclusive Communication Guide](#) gives examples on how you can learn more about effective communication.

Read more [here](#) about neurodiversity and explore tips for employers.

And most of all – we can't afford NOT to include. A lack of awareness and understanding leads to hiring processes, management practices and workspaces being designed only with neurotypicals in mind.

Inclusion and diversity at AFRY

AFRY works with inclusion and diversity in different parts of the business, daily – through the Immigrated Competence Programme, through trainings and workshops, through supporting materials, through internal and external events, and through and different types of partnerships. Learn more about what we do in inclusion and diversity [here](#).

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Making Future

