

Working Different

*A guide for supporting
neurodiversity and enabling
success in hybrid
working environments*



1 About this guide

With many organisations continually evolving their working models, including updates to hybrid arrangements and return-of-office mandates, it is essential that all colleagues are supported to succeed through this transition.

With around 15% of the UK workforce estimated to be neurodivergent, creating conditions that enable everyone to do their best work is essential.¹

Objective of this guide

This guide explores how neurodiversity can shape experiences of hybrid working, and how colleagues can best be supported. While primarily written for neurodivergent individuals, it will also be a valuable resource for managers and teammates looking to create more inclusive hybrid environments. This guide includes practical tips, adjustments, and examples to help everyone feel supported and able to thrive—whether working from home or in the office.

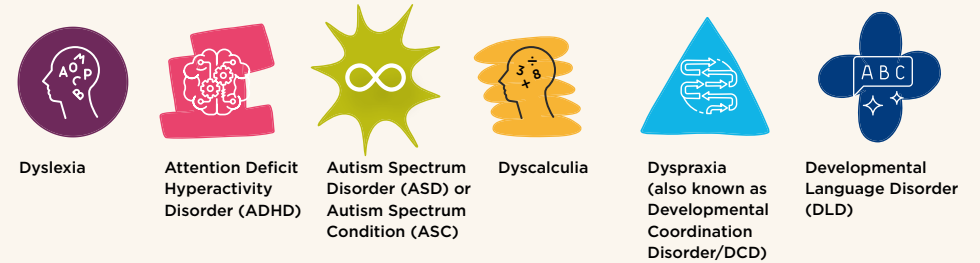
What is neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity refers to the range of thinking, learning, and interaction styles that exist in the whole population. If someone is neurodivergent, they think, learn, and interact with people differently from what is considered 'typical' within our society.

Different minds demonstrate very different skills—and these are increasingly valued in a variety of roles and functions in all kinds of organisations.



Examples of neurodivergent conditions include:



The impact of neurodiversity on hybrid working

Hybrid working can have a significant impact on neurodivergent individuals, shaping their experiences in different ways. This way of working can bring a range of strengths and difficulties, such as:

- Office sensory experiences can cause **overstimulation** from noise, lighting, and temperature
- **Executive functioning differences** mean some thrive with strong planning but may need support with prioritisation, time management, or task switching
- **Communication styles** vary, including how information is processed, briefs are received, and written or verbal tone is interpreted
- **Social energy** may be affected by office environments (especially open plan), with differing needs for spontaneous interaction and recharge time
- **Context switching** between home and office can increase cognitive overload
- **Regular environment changes** can have positive or negative impacts, depending on the individual
- Some individuals experience **hyperfocus**, enabling intense concentration and high-quality outputs on complex tasks
- **Strong resilience and problem-solving skills**, including self-advocacy, adaptability, and creative barrier-solving

Everyone is different

It is important to remember that no two neurodivergent individuals will experience their traits in the same way. Whether you're talking about your own experiences or trying to understand someone else's, the best approach is to be honest, listen, and adapt accordingly.

Further HCA reading

This guide compliments a wider initiative developed by the HCA to encourage constructive, open conversations around neurodivergence in healthcare communications agencies and healthcare companies. For more information on neurodiversity and the workplace, please refer to the Thinking Different campaign resources below:

- [Thinking Different — A guide for employers and managers on welcoming and celebrating neurodiversity](#)
- [Neurodiversity & Me](#)
- [Neurodiversity & You](#)

2 Setting up a productive working space when working from home (WFH)

Home working has its benefits, but it can also mean juggling deadlines next to dishwashers, doorbells, and unexpected distractions.

Creating a workspace that feels calm, intentional, and tailored to your needs can really help you make the most of WFH. You don't need to apply all these tips - even one small change can make a large difference.

Creating an effective workspace



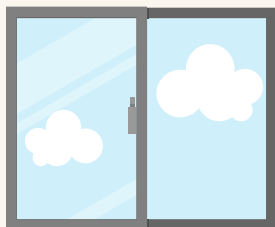
1. Quiet and designated area

- When choosing where to set up your workspace, choose a consistent spot wherever possible; **predictability can reduce mental load**
- Use physical boundaries (a screen divider, different chair, or even a specific lamp) to “signal” entering work mode



2. Minimising distractions and sensory clutter

- Use noise-cancelling headphones, earplugs, or white noise in loud environments
- Enable browser extensions that block distracting sites
- Turn off non-essential notifications on phones, emails, and virtual collaboration platforms (e.g. MS Teams or Slack)



3. Natural light and sensory comfort

- Position your desk near a window, where possible
- Adjustable lamps, warm bulbs, or daylight-mimicking lights can be especially helpful in the winter months
- Ensure comfort in your surroundings (e.g. temperature and textures)

In practice

“I enable night mode on my laptop to reduce headaches and prevent overstimulation, as well as using low-light lamps which I find significantly better for my focus and mental wellbeing than the ‘big light’ at home!”

“In my personal experience as someone with ADHD, setting up a productive workspace when working remotely meant being as comfortable as possible. I bought a wide, soft office chair that can support sitting cross-legged (my go-to position), and I move around the house to limit fatigue and to encourage a change of scenery.”

Routine setting and work/life balance

Finding a steady routine and maintaining balance between work and life can be challenging for neurodivergent people whose energy and processing needs may vary day to day. Being able to shape routines and boundaries is a key part of feeling grounded, healthy, and able to thrive.

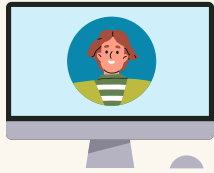
- Establishing a predictable **routine** where possible can help reduce anxiety and mental load
- Use time-blocking or colour-coded calendars to **focus your intentions and efforts**
- Schedule intentional breaks: **5 minutes of movement** or quiet reset time often helps with sensory or cognitive regulation or overload
- **“Commute substitutes”** (e.g., a morning and evening walk) can help signal the start and end of the workday
- Remember, it isn't only the responsibility of the employee to develop balanced working patterns. Line managers can offer guidance on company policies on **work/life balance**, and provide support to help individuals protect personal time



Speak to your line manager or to HR or People teams for information on any stipends or policies supporting WFH ergonomic equipment that may be available.

Hybrid communication styles

Hybrid work often increases reliance on digital communication. Neurodivergent individuals may find:



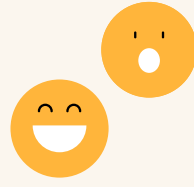
Video calls

overstimulating or draining, especially with expectations for cameras to be on.



Emails and messaging

easier or harder, depending on information processing needs.



Code-switching between different communication styles depending on the platform, e.g., use of emojis and gifs in instant messages but not emails.

"I use a voice-to-text tool during calls to accommodate my difficulties with auditory processing. It makes it easier to take in what is being said, and I don't have to worry about taking notes."

"As an autistic person, I prefer some forms of digital communication to in-person. Emojis in particular are incredibly helpful — real-time, easy-to-understand feedback without the mental load of interpreting facial expressions and tone of voice."

Try the following tips for clearer digital communication:

- Including or asking for an **agenda** before calls. Even a short list of bullets will help set expectations of what preparation or contribution is needed
- Being explicit about **expectations** ("reply today", "no action needed", etc.)
- Allowing **cameras-off** options
- Using **captions** during calls, if helpful

Managers and colleagues can help by offering flexibility and being mindful of communication preferences.

It is important that those in leadership positions set the tone for the rest of the team by demonstrating healthy working practices and engaging with available training.

Avoiding getting overwhelmed from virtual communications

Digital communication can easily become overwhelming for neurodivergent people, who may find the volume, speed, and unpredictability of messages draining. The mental effort required to process tone, switch between platforms, and respond quickly can build up fast.

To help with this, try the following strategies to help support sustainable communication:

- Block off time in the calendar for "deep work" where notifications are muted and colleagues know you are unavailable to help manage cognitive load
- Turn off previews of instant messages (MS Teams, Slack, etc.) to reduce interruption
- Change calendar settings so meetings are 25/50 minutes as default, to allow for "breathing space" between meetings
- Ask for written follow-ups to calls and/or use of AI note takers
- Combine messages rather than sending multiple pings in a row

In practice

"To avoid overwhelm from virtual comms, I switch off notifications from emails and Teams on my phone. This has helped detach from 'urgency culture' and allowed me to set a boundary where I don't check my emails outside of working hours and can mentally separate from the working day."



3 Setting yourself up for success when coming into the office

Working in the office can help foster connections, collaboration, and creativity.

However, it may also involve extra sensory load, unpredictable interactions, and changes in routine, which can be challenging for neurodivergent individuals. Preparing ahead of time can make office days easier to manage and help make the most of the opportunities for connection, collaboration, and support.

✓ Routine setting and managing unpredictability

Returning to the office can introduce sensory and social demands.

To help manage this, experiment with the following strategies:

- Preparing the night before (bag packed, outfit chosen, lunch ready) to avoid decision fatigue
- Checking your meeting schedule and office attendance days to reduce surprises
- Arriving slightly earlier or later to avoid busy commuting times
- Reserving a regular desk, or having a rotation of regular desks where possible to avoid mental burden from hot desking
- Setting a predictable weekly office rhythm where possible

✓ Avoiding and managing overstimulation

One colleague may see the office as lively and exciting while another may see the same scenario as bright, noisy, and unpredictable.

Reducing sensory overload is important and you can try the following options:

- Choose seating away from high-traffic areas
- Use noise-cancelling headphones or earplugs
- Request adjustable lighting or use desk lamps
- Take “quiet breaks” in low-stimulation spaces
- Use sensory tools like fidget items if helpful

✓ Accessibility support

Many companies already offer adjustments, and more can often be requested.

Examples of adjustments you can request often include:

- Screen resolution and font adjustments
- Ergonomic chairs
- Standing desks
- Noise-cancelling headphones
- Assistive software (dictation tools, screen readers, scheduling apps)

Managers can and should proactively ask: “What would help make coming into the office more comfortable and productive for you?”

✓ In-person socialising and networking

Social elements of office life can be energising for some and draining for others. Helpful approaches to make the most out of in-person connections while protecting your energy levels include:

- Structured social interactions (planned coffee chats vs spontaneous drop-ins)
- Choosing quieter spaces for catch ups
- Allowing colleagues to opt-in rather than feeling pressured to attend everything
- Scheduling recovery time after socially demanding days

“To help manage my time, workload, boundaries and to reduce overwhelm, I have strict time-blockers in my diary to protect my time. This includes admin time, ‘no meeting’ time, and my full lunch hour. These non-negotiable slots ensure that I can have breaks between calls, self-manage overstimulation and, crucially, that I am including a meal and a walk to get fresh air in my working day, especially when I’m in the office.”

“I genuinely didn’t realise that chatting with colleagues in the office was part of the job — I thought it was just people pulling me away from my “real” work... Now I understand that those interactions are important for team culture I can re-frame how I think about office days.”

4 Seeking support

Navigating hybrid working as a neurodivergent individual can feel overwhelming, but you don't have to do it alone.

The most effective support often comes from open, honest conversations with colleagues, leaders, and wider teams who are there to help you succeed. Seeking support is a proactive step toward creating a working environment that helps you thrive.

Talking to line managers

Your line manager is often the first point of contact for workplace adjustments and day-to-day support. They can help in several ways including:

- Clarifying and sharing expectations and communication preferences
- Shaping hybrid routines that accommodate your needs
- Identifying tasks or environments that play to your strengths
- Exploring practical adjustments for both office and home working
- Reducing a sense of overwhelm by helping to prioritise workloads

These conversations don't need to centre on a formal diagnosis—they can instead focus on what helps someone perform at their best, wherever they're working.

Speaking with HR or People teams

HR or People teams provide a more formal layer of support. They may offer:

- Guidance on reasonable adjustments and assistive technology
- Advice on hybrid working policies and flexibility
- Support with neurodiversity-related questions or disclosures
- Information on wellbeing resources, benefits, or stipends
- Mediation if communication challenges emerge within teams

A formal diagnosis is **not necessary** to request support; these teams exist to ensure all employees can work comfortably and sustainably.

Connecting with Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)

Some companies may have ERGs dedicated to helping foster diverse and inclusive workspaces. These are often employee-led and can represent a large variety of identities.

Where a company has a neurodiversity ERG, it can be a valuable space to:

- Connect with colleagues who have similar experiences
- Share strategies, tips, and lived experiences
- Discover internal or external resources others have found useful
- Contribute to wider organisational neuro-inclusion initiatives

These groups often help turn individual experiences into collective understanding, contributing to a more inclusive workplace culture.

"I've been open with my team, line manager, and the People team about my ADHD and how it affects me both personally and professionally. I make a point of scheduling check-ins with the resourcing team, my manager, and/or the People team whenever I feel I might be struggling—whether that's with workload or with ADHD-related symptoms. Having previously experienced severe burnout that led to physical illness, it's really important for me to recognise the early signs and ask for support before things reach that point."



5 Other resources

If you would like more information on neurodiversity, strategies for managing hybrid working, or individual support, you can visit any of the resources or organisations below:

- The HCA's [Thinking Different campaign](#) in collaboration with Fox&Cat, and The ADHD Foundation
- [Neurodiversity Celebration Week](#)
- [Institute of Neurodiversity](#)
- [Dyspraxia Foundation](#)
- [The Brain Charity](#)
- [National Autistic Society](#)
- [British Dyslexia Association](#)



References

1. <https://www.cuh.nhs.uk/our-people/neurodiversity-at-cuh/what-is-neurodiversity/>

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Disclaimer

We have aligned language to the current definitions around neurodiversity, but we acknowledge that our choices may not reflect everyone's views.