

Neurodiversity at Work:

How to Navigate The Workplace While Prioritizing Mental Health



Each of our brains is unique—sort of like a fingerprint. This is referred to as **neurodiversity**. Despite our individual differences, brains can generally be grouped into two categories: 1) neurotypical and 2) neurodivergent.

Individuals who are **neurodivergent** may have a fundamentally different way of:

Learning

Perceiving the world

Communicating

Interacting socially

The following categories are considered neurodivergent: giftedness, learning disorders, ADHD, Autism spectrum, Tourette syndrome, tic disorders, motor coordination concerns, and mental health concerns.

Neurodivergent employees bring unique contributions to the workplace, like:



Improved products and services



Out of the box thinking



Attention to detail



Normalizing diverse perspectives



Increasing sense of inclusion and belonging



Unique challenges and strategies to navigate them

Every neurodivergent employee will have their own unique experience at work. However, there are common challenges neurodivergent employees may face.



Differences in learning styles

People learn in different ways. It's important to consider what works for you to optimize your learning.

How do I like to learn?

☐

Hear it (verbal)

☐

Read it (written)

☐

Do it myself (hands on)

☐

See it (demonstration)



Strategies to try:

- Reflect on your learning style
- Communicate about how you learn best
 - “I really retain information best if you can give it to me in writing, in bullet point format”
- In general, most learn better with an active approach:
 - Interact with the material you are learning in different ways (e.g., read, take notes, teach)
 - Helps with learning, attention, and memory





Differences in social communication

Workplaces often have neurotypical expectations for how to socialize, including assuming everyone:

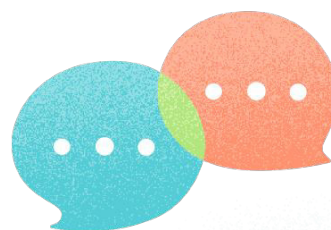
- Shares the same definition of strong communication, i.e., “Speaking up”
- Ability to interpret nonverbal cues like rolling eyes or sarcastic tone
- Ability to interpret non-literal language, like idioms and metaphors

This can pose challenges.



Strategies to try:

- Share communication preferences
 - “I am generally most efficient when I’m able to communicate in writing and I want to be sure I get you my best work. Is that ok with you?”
- Ask for clarification if something is unclear
- Use talk to text software
- Use text to speech software



Differences in executive functioning

Executive functioning refers to skills like maintaining attention, motivation, planning, organization, impulse control, multitasking, and time management. For a number of reasons, neurodivergent employees may find certain areas of executive functioning to be difficult, including:

- Attention:
 - Difficulty staying focused on tasks, paying attention in meetings, easily distracted
- Motivation:
 - Difficulty getting started on tasks without time pressure

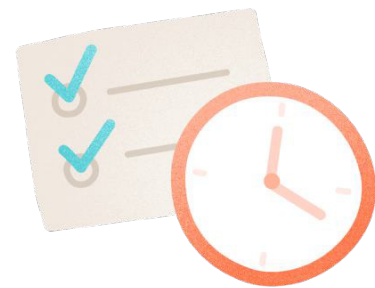
⚙️ Strategies to try for paying attention:

- Reduce distractions
 - Noise canceling headphones, white noise apps, earplugs
 - Turn off non-urgent notifications
- Increase movement
 - Standing desk and fidget items
- Take breaks
 - Including movement
- Increase focus on meeting content
 - Camera off meeting
 - Closed captioning



⚙️ Strategies to try for boosting motivation:

- Timeboxing
 - Break large tasks into smaller steps
 - Schedule steps into your calendar
- Motivation boosters
 - Set a timer for 20 mins
 - Play a motivating song
 - Change up your environment
 - Ask someone else to stay nearby (e.g., body doubling)
 - Ask for more frequent due dates





Differences in sensory sensitivities

Sensory sensitivities can impact attention, concentration, learning, and energy level. They can feel dangerous or overwhelming, too. In some instances they can lead to fatigue, anxiety, and shutting down when it's difficult to filter out.



Strategies to try:

- Gain more control over your environment, if possible
- Filter out sensory information:
 - Alternative lighting
 - White noise or noise canceling headphones
 - Aromatherapy
- Take sensory breaks



Accommodations

In some cases, the strategies an employee can try on their own will not be enough and they may want to ask for formal workplace accommodations. In most situations, in order to get accommodations, an employee must disclose either their diagnosis, their limitations/symptoms or both to whoever manages their accommodation process. For many—but not all—companies this is HR business partners. The process for accommodations depends on company policy and will usually involve a provider filling out paperwork.

Reasonable accommodations are reasonable changes an employer can make that does not place excessive or disproportionate burden to ensure that a qualified individual with a disability can perform essential job functions.

Sometimes employees can manage their own accommodations independently (and informally) and other times a more formal request will be necessary.



Accommodation Examples

Formal	Informal
Work from home (outside company policy)	Personal noise canceling headphones
Ergonomic equipment	Use of apps for task prioritization or stress management
Modification of job duties	Fidget items
Adaptive equipment	Calendars, alerts, planners
Accessible technology	Closed captioning
Job coaching	More frequent meetings or feedback from supervisors

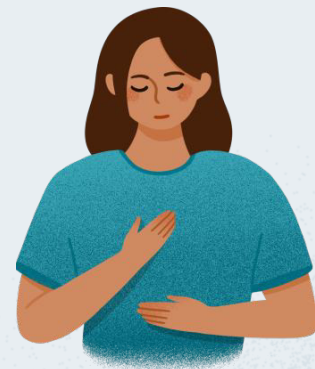


Mental health challenges

There are also mental health challenges you may experience as a neurodivergent employee:

- 60-80% report mental health diagnoses
- Pressure to meet neurotypical expectations
- Masking or hiding differences
- Teasing, bullying, microaggressions

A few important ways you can get started supporting your mental health are: prioritizing self-care and building community and getting support.





Strategies to try:



Setting Boundaries



Taking Breaks



Exercise



Nutrition



Sleep



Socializing



Strategies to try for building community and getting support:



Employee Resource Groups



Outside Organization



Support groups



Lyra Mental Health resources

Lyra is here to support you. To sign up/learn more visit
care.lyrahealth.com