



Unlocking neurodiversity in the workplace

A guide for HR & DE&I Professionals

About this guide

This guide is designed to support leaders and business professionals who are curious about neurodiversity. In the guide, uncover the power of neurodiverse teams. Gain advice to help you support neurodivergent employees.



This guide will be particularly helpful for HR Professionals, DE&I Specialists, Engagement Managers, CEO's, and Disability Champions who are at the early stages of adopting new processes around neurodiversity.



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The power of neurodiversity



Neurodiversity exists in the world & should be embraced in the workplace too!

Recruiting the right candidate, for the right role and keeping them there for as long as possible will undoubtedly do wonders for any business. But have you considered that the perfect candidate could be a neurodivergent individual?

Neurodiversity is the term used to describe natural variations in the human brain. Most people are neurotypical, meaning their brain functions in the way that society expects. 1 in 7 people are neurodivergent, meaning their brain functions differently in one or more ways than is considered standard or typical.

Neurodiverse conditions are used to characterize diverse ways of thinking, learning, processing and behaving. A non-exhaustive list might include dyslexia, autism, dyspraxia, and ADHD.

1 in 10 HR professionals consider neurodiversity in the workplace for various reasons:

- ✓ Attract new talent
- ✓ Improve staff retention
- ✓ Develop good practice
- ✓ Improve diversity and inclusion
- ✓ Enhance innovation
- ✓ Improve productivity
- ✓ Increase profits
- ✓ Adhere to disability law, including Equality Act 2010, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and Council for Canadians with Disabilities Act



It's not just about 'doing the right thing'.

Data suggests that neurodivergent employees increase the productivity of a company by nearly as much as 50% (Siemens) - resulting in increased profits and customer satisfaction.

Companies that are currently leading the charge in hiring neurodivergent workers include accounting firm EY, software company SAP, Microsoft, and Hewlett Packard Enterprises.

“

The more diverse and inclusive a workplace, the better and faster problems are solved. Innovation will occur at a greater rate, too.

”

Nathalie Lynton,
HR expert, Shared and Halved Consulting



02

The strengths of neurodiverse teams



Neurodiverse teams benefit from increased productivity and innovation. That's because diverse thinking is the reason great things happen in the workplace, and beyond.

Specifically, neurodivergent individuals strengthen a workforce with out-of-the-box thinking, creative solutions, and more.

Let's take a look at the strengths associated with dyslexia, autism, dyspraxia & ADHD.





Dyslexia

- **Creativity:** Dyslexics are more likely to think in images. The brain is skilled in visual processing and can consider objects from a greater number of angles.
- **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, dyslexics 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.



Autism

- **Concentration:** Autistic people 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 unusually creative ideas. With superb attention to detail, such creativity can lead to great problem-solving.
- **Reliable:** Routine and structure is important to people with autism. It helps make the world less confusing. Therefore, autistic individuals are often very punctual.



Dyspraxia

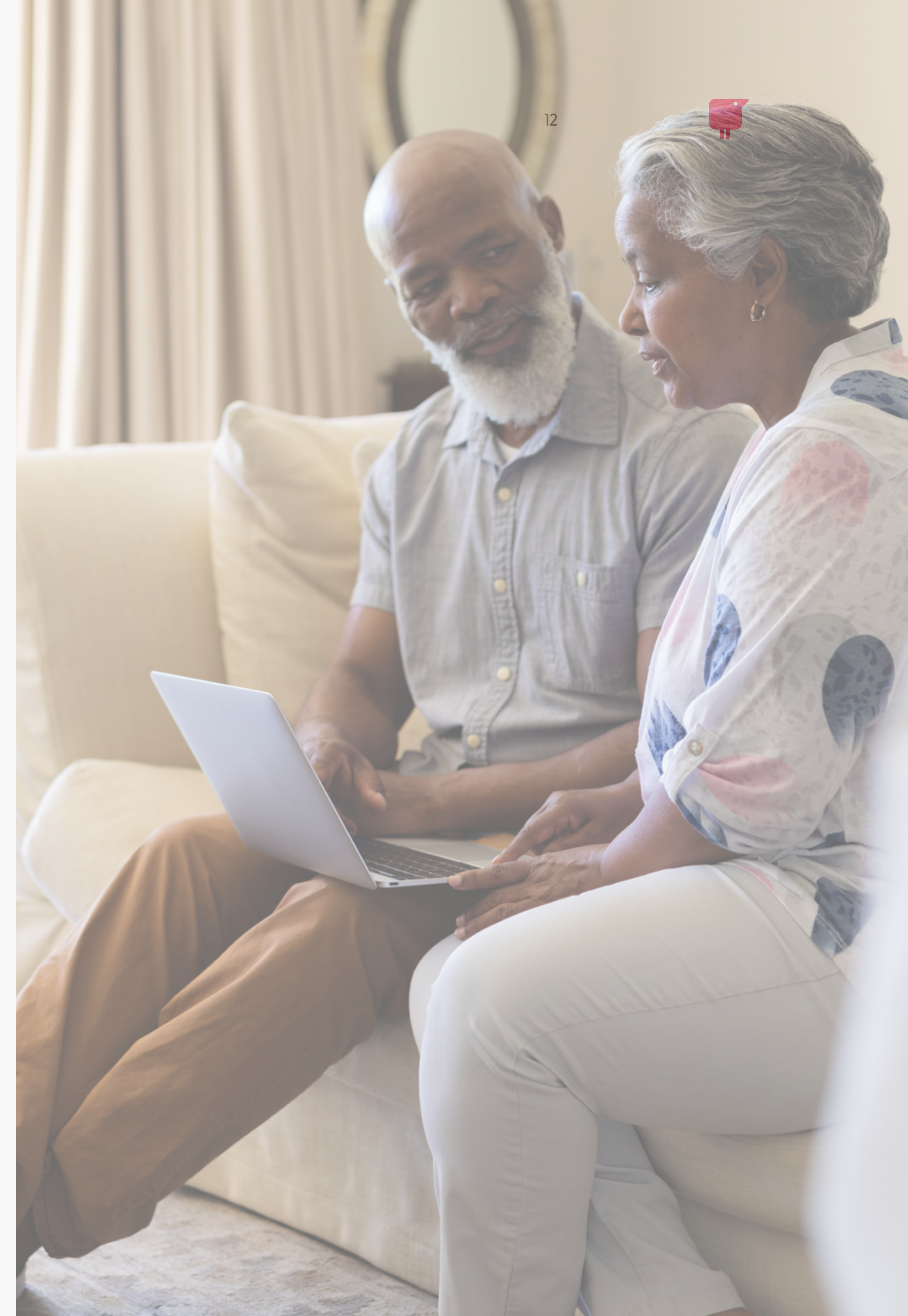
- **Awareness of others:** People with dyspraxia often have a strong sense of empathy and a good awareness of others. That makes them great team members.
- **Motivation:** Individuals with dyspraxia often have high motivation and a determination to succeed. That means they can succeed extremely well with individual tasks.
- **Innovation:** Generally more intelligent than the average person, those with dyspraxia are often holistic and strategic thinkers. They have very complex minds that excel at innovation and problem-solving.



ADHD

(Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder)

- **Hyperfocus:** Individuals with ADHD often experience hyperfocus, 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.
- **Proactiveness:** Those with ADHD are often proactive and have the ability to work well under pressure.



03

Neurodiversity
comes in all forms



Did you know? **Neurodivergence can also be acquired.**

Autism, ADHD, dyspraxia and dyslexia (and more) are considered as developmental forms of neurodiversity. That means, neurodivergent traits are present from birth, but develop in childhood and adolescence.

Through life, neurodiverse conditions can also be acquired. For example, as a result of a brain-altering experience such as a Traumatic Brain Injury, a stroke or tumour.

It's important to be ready to support your employees through life's events, and be prepared to help them adjust to their new way of working and living.



Texthelp's Nikki Goode shares her story as an employee with an acquired brain injury.



READ NIKKI'S STORY

04

Support for
neurodivergent employees



To welcome the benefits of neurodiversity, employees must be empowered to work and achieve in their own way.

Typically, the workplace is set up for neurotypical ways of thinking and doing. That means neurodivergent employees often spend a lot of time trying to adjust their work environment to suit their needs.

Below, we identify 6 steps to creating a workplace that embraces diverse thinkers.



01: Start at the top

Neurodiversity is rising up in the business agenda. Awareness is filtering through businesses at different levels - but without educating the senior management team, and getting their buy in - making changes within the company may prove difficult. Sharing the benefits of a neurodiverse workforce can help. Creating a business case that can be presented to senior management is a good place to start.

Not sure where to begin?

[Here's some advice from HR experts at SHRM](#)





02: Educate and train your staff

Neurodiversity awareness training can help to create an open and friendly environment, with the right support available for neurodivergent employees.

It can empower line managers to spot any potential barriers to diverse ways of working. It can help them to identify employees that may be experiencing challenges. As well as provide them with the knowledge and confidence to offer support.

Awareness training may also encourage line managers to raise awareness of neurodiversity within their own team. By educating other colleagues about neurodiversity and particular neurodiverse traits,

it can help to remove any preconceptions around neurodivergent individuals. This can encourage teams to adapt, so that specialist talents of neurodivergent employees can flourish.

For example, when allocating tasks within a project, a neurodivergent member of staff may feel best placed carrying out research and coming up with creative ideas, whilst another member of staff writes up the findings in a report.

Interested in awareness training? Look out for companies that offer accredited training, such as Genius Within. Their training is available to large groups and can cover condition recognition and awareness, as well as support strategies and reasonable adjustments.



03: Consider a champion

It's a good idea to have a neurodiversity champion in the workplace. This is someone who is extremely approachable and very knowledgeable, with a passion to encourage and support those with neurodiverse needs.

As a champion, they continue to gain knowledge around the area of interest and have an ability to spot neurodiverse traits within the workplace.

The champion can determine the level of support required, request changes to the working environment or technology, and ensure they continue to help and be supportive.

They're also the link to management. Their passion and knowledge on the strengths and benefits of neurodiversity can drive change and influence - sometimes helping with business cases, and reporting successes or feedback on a regular basis.

Got a champion in mind? [They might find this useful.](#)





04: Adjust recruitment & staff development practices

Welcoming a neurodiverse workforce can often mean that recruitment and development processes need to change.

Often job descriptions are written in a way that excludes neurodivergent applicants. For example, many job descriptions state that candidates 'must have excellent communication skills'. This can be uninviting to people who feel they don't have strong writing skills. Instead, job descriptions should focus on the specific skills related to the actual job role.

Application, interview and onboarding processes should also be considered. Here's some tips...

- Choose accessible platforms to advertise with. If the application is online via your own website, consider adding assistive technology to the page. This could increase text size, provide visual alternatives to text and have the option for dual color highlighting.
- Review the selection process. Rather than relying on a CV and interview, consider offering an alternative way for candidates to share their talents. Those with creative strengths may shine more during a real life task than by answering questions and referring back to past experiences.
- Review the interview questions asked and how they are phrased. Remove complicated language and hypothetical questions.



GAIN MORE TIPS



05: Create a more inclusive working environment

A few simple changes can make the biggest impact for neurodivergent employees.

- Flexible working hours may improve performance significantly. Allowing a neurodivergent employee to arrive earlier and leave earlier can help to avoid large groups of people, which can be less stressful for travel and parking. Arriving early can also mean the employee can benefit from quiet time to focus on tasks with less distractions.
- Working from home can be a huge benefit. It allows time for staff to work in their own quiet and familiar space. This can be beneficial when completing tasks that could cause anxiety in a busy workplace. For example, preparing for and practicing delivering a presentation.

- Create 'thinking spaces' for quiet contemplation. Noise and distractions are barriers for neurotypical employees on most occasions, but for neurodivergent individuals, this could be amplified significantly. Quiet areas are great for getting away from the busy open plan office to concentrate and focus on getting the job done.
- Desk location should also be considered. Some individuals may prefer to be located in a corner - away from visual distractions.

keep diversity & inclusion in mind for home working:



READ 10 TIPS FOR GOING HYBRID



06: Provide the right tools for staff to do their job

Before investing in the right tools, it is better to know and understand the needs of your employees.

Consider the range of support available and match them depending on the need. As part of onboarding or through a neurodiversity champion, ask what each employee reasonably feels they need to work more efficiently. We have a few ideas to consider...

- [Time-management software](#) for people with autism or ADHD. The use of calendars, planners and alerts helps to plan daily activities, manage time effectively, and support memory challenges.
- Instant messaging such as [Google Hangouts](#) may be a more motivating medium in which to communicate with colleagues.
- [Mind-mapping software](#) for those who prefer visual working as opposed to linear lists.
- Noise-cancelling headphones to avoid distracting or confusing noises. Perfect for those with autism and ADHD.
- Assistive technology features such as [screen filters](#) to help those sensitive to the intensity or frequency of light, and [text to speech](#) to help auditory processors such as dyslexics.

04

Hear from businesses
embracing neurodiversity



At Texthelp, we're lucky to work with companies that are doing amazing work in the space of diversity and inclusion. When it comes to embracing and celebrating neurodiversity in the workplace, here's what some of our associates say:

Sainsbury's

"Disability inclusion is something that we're really committed to. It's not only the right thing to do, it's also central to our performance as a business. And again, fulfilling our inclusion aim of being the most inclusive place to work."

[Discover more from Sainsbury's](#)



"We go to great lengths to create an environment where everyone can be themselves while they're in the workplace...It's all about giving [staff] the capability to become more effective. This could reduce stress, they become more productive, [and that] reduces absenteeism."

[Hear more from Network Rail](#)



"We want everyone to come in and feel positive and be able to carry out their role to the best of their abilities. All of us need support to be able to do that: [providing support] demonstrates that we really do invest in our staff and care about their wellbeing."

[Discover more from Guy's & St. Thomas](#)



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

"It's our responsibility to make sure every employee can perform to the best of their abilities."

Supporting over 14,000 employees with assistive technology software, FCO say; "it's efficient, cost effective and easy to administer – and it delivers the best outcome for all staff"

[Explore more from FCO](#)

05

Useful resources



Further Reading

[Diversity, Equity & Inclusion:
7 key thoughts from DE&I experts](#)

[Understanding & empowering
neurodiversity in the workplace](#)

[Why employers should be hiring
with neurodiversity in mind](#)

[Podcast:
Dyslexia, the workplace & me](#)

[How neurodiversity is driving
innovation from unexpected places](#)

[Video series: Supporting
neurodivergent employees at work](#)

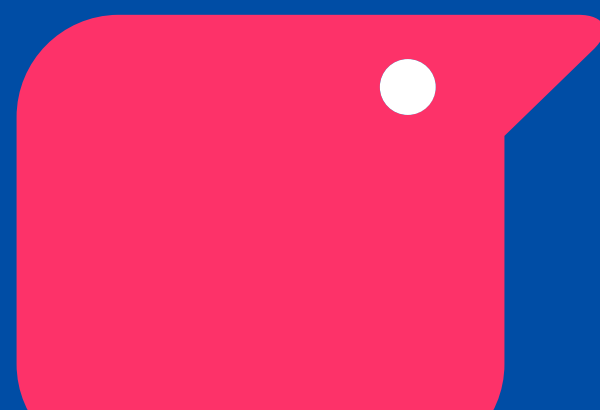
[How to build an HR business case](#)

[Support technology:
Read&Write for Work](#)



06

About Texthelp





This guide is brought to you from Texthelp

At Texthelp we believe that absolutely everyone deserves the opportunity to reach their full potential: at school, in the workplace and in later life, too.

We believe in digital inclusion - where disability, difference, or language aren't barriers to the online opportunities that others enjoy.

Most importantly of all, we believe that everyone's entitled to the best possible learning and language support on their own personal journey.



Our inclusive technology helps businesses attract, retain and nurture a diverse workforce.



DISCOVER [READ&WRITE](#)



We hope you enjoyed the guide. Contact our inclusive technology experts for more information on how technology can support neurodiversity in the workplace.



If you haven't done so already, sign up to receive our useful industry content including various case studies, diversity & inclusion focused guides, webinars with industry thought leaders, and more.

+ SIGN ME UP

