

**AN INTRODUCTION TO
NEURODIVERSITY**

DEI
ESSENTIALS

CONTENTS

CONTENTS.....	2
LEARNING OBJECTIVES.....	3
FEATURED VIDEOS	3
FILM 1 – UNDERSTANDING NEURODIVERSITY.....	4
FILM 2 – ATTENTION DEFICIT HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER (ADHD).....	6
FILM 3 - DYSLEXIA.....	7
FILM 4 - AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD).....	8
GROUP EXERCISE.....	6

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Around 15% of people in the UK are neurodivergent, with 700,000 autistic adults and 10% with dyslexia. All of us need to recognise and support neurodiversity and highlight the need for more resources and support for those living with neurodivergent conditions.

Unfortunately, people with neurodivergent conditions still encounter challenges entering the workplace. Neurodiverse people are 3–8 times more likely to be unemployed than people with or without disabilities, with an unemployment rate of 30-40%.

Moreover, many Neurodiverse people either mask or hide their condition when they are in the workplace out of fear. Inclusive policies and practices in the workplace, as well as the need for more education and awareness around Neurodiversity will help create a more equitable and inclusive environment.

The objective of this course is to prompt your group to think about your own organisation and consider your workplace's approach to neurodiversity and inclusion and what you can do to improve it. They will be able to discuss if you need to shift people's attitudes or organisations procedures towards a more neurodivergent culture.

The workshop guide is structured like this.

LOOK – watch the videos and reflect on the content and message.

THINK – activities and questions linking the videos to their own experience and workplace.

REMEMBER – a summary of the key learning points.

Each section relating to the videos will last around 15 minutes.

PRACTISE – At the end of the series of videos there is a practical exercise which will bring the learnings together. Delegates should be encouraged to record any personal development actions on their Personal Action Plan sheet.

FEATURED VIDEOS

- Understanding neurodiversity
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Dyslexia
- Autism spectrum disorder (ASD)

FILM 1 – UNDERSTANDING NEURODIVERSITY

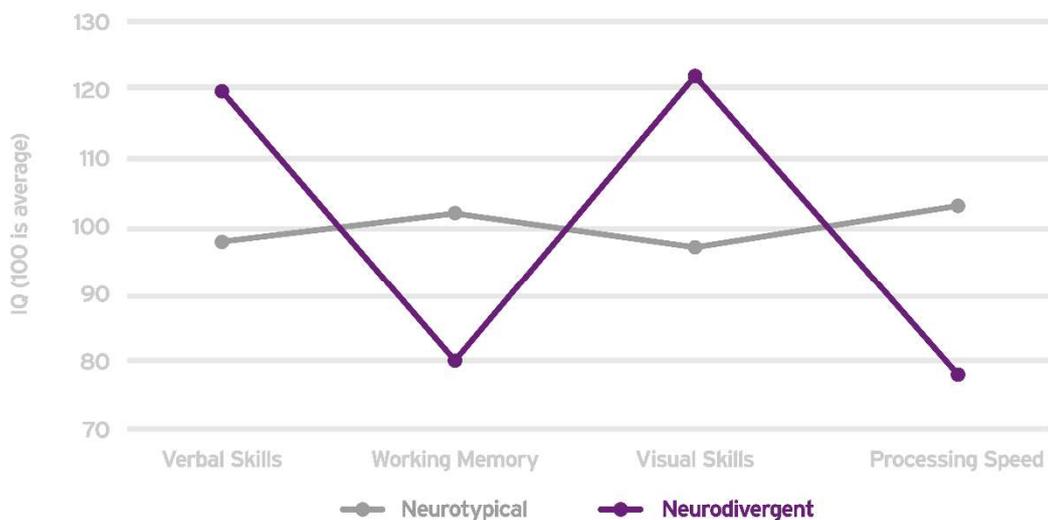
LOOK (play video, 3 minutes)

Give the group some background before you show the film. Every individual has a unique brain! But some managers, like David, harbour plenty of misconceptions around neurodiversity.

THINK (10 minutes discussion)

Explain to the group that the word neurodivergent was coined by sociologist Judy Singer in 1997 and show them this definition: “Neurodiversity refers to the virtually infinite neuro-cognitive variability within Earth’s human population. It points to the fact that every human has a unique nervous system with a unique combination of abilities and needs.” Being neurodivergent means having a brain that excels in certain areas while finding others more challenging.

As you can show with this graph, neurodiversity has a ‘spiky’ presentation, with some areas of excellent strength and some of significant challenge. In contrast, the ‘neurotypical’ presentation is a bit less spiky.



Source: Doyle N. Neurodiversity at work

Now ask the group to come up with a list of types of neurodiversity. Share the list below of the most common types. If you are not an expert or neurodiverse yourself, you may want to encourage the group to research more about these from a trusted resource.

Autism, or Autism Spectrum Conditions

A neurological and developmental disorder that affects how people interact with others, communicate, learn and behave.

ADHD: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

A condition that affects people's behaviour; people living with this disorder can seem restless, have trouble concentrating and may act on impulse.

Dyscalculia

A condition that affects the ability to acquire arithmetical skills.

Dyslexia

A learning difficulty that primarily affects the skills involved in accurate and fluent word reading and spelling.

Dyspraxia

Also known as developmental co-ordination disorder (DCD), this is a common disorder that affects movement and co-ordination.

There are a number of other examples of how brains can process information differently. Some people consider these to be part of the 'neurodiversity' umbrella and others like to keep them separate - there's no right or wrong answer.

Cognitive functioning difficulties or executive dysfunction

Dysgraphia

Misophonia

Slow processing speed

Stammering

Tourette's syndrome

While some terms like 'disorders' may be used as part of the diagnostic label, it's important to exercise caution around the use of this term and focus instead on highlighting the advantages and strengths of neurodiverse minds.

However, according to the City & Guilds Neurodiversity report 2023, 32% of neurodivergent respondents hadn't disclosed their condition in the workplace.

REMEMBER

Remind the group that Every individual has a unique brain! We all possess strengths and areas where we face challenges, but for some, these differences are more pronounced. Being neurodivergent means having a brain that excels in certain areas while finding others more challenging. While some terms like "disorders" may be used as part of the diagnostic label, it's important to exercise caution around the use of this term and focus on highlighting the advantages and strengths of neurodiverse minds.

FILM 2 – ADHD

LOOK (play video, 3 minutes)

Set the scene for the team before showing the video where we are a 'fly on the wall' observing a workplace lunch break. Ryan thinks he understands ADHD – he doesn't!

THINK (10 minutes discussion)

Explain that attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterised by differences in the structure and function of parts of the brain that are involved in attention, thinking ahead/planning and motivation. Around 4-5% of the population have the condition. Approximately 1 in 2 people with ADHD have dyslexia, 9 in 10 people with Tourette's have ADHD, 2 in 3 people with ADHD have autistic spectrum traits, and people with ADHD are 8-fold more likely to meet full criteria for an autistic spectrum diagnosis.

Symptoms of ADHD vary, but it is associated with difficulty concentrating, hyperactivity and impulsiveness. However, people with ADHD are often highly creative, energetic and able to hyperfocus to work more efficiently than neurotypical people.

The UK charity ADHD Foundation reported a 400% increase in the number of adults requesting an assessment since 2020. Treatment can involve regular exercise, medication, and therapy.

Ask the group discuss and feedback on how we should support people with ADHD in the workplace. Responses should include these three areas.

Distractibility. Problems with external noises and movement in the surrounding environment) or internal distractibility (daydreams) can be the biggest challenge for adults with ADHD. Try to find a more private space or quieter area where distractions are few.

Time management difficulties. Managing time can be a big challenge for adults with ADHD. Use time-line charts to break large projects into smaller pieces, with step-by-step due dates.

Hyperactivity. People with the hyperactive presentation of ADHD often do better in jobs that allow a great deal of movement, such as sales, but if they have a sedentary job requiring focus, encouraging intermittent breaks, exercising, or even taking the notes in meetings to prevent restlessness may help.

REMEMBER

People with ADHD will often have some great strengths in creative thinking but may find it hard to maintain focus for longer projects. As each individual with ADHD has a different set of challenges, it's important to consider their unique picture, as you go about designing strategies, accommodations and modifications for the workplace.

FILM 3 – DYSLEXIA

LOOK (play video, 2 minutes)

Set the scene for the team before showing the video. Among adults, dyslexia is the most common type of neurodivergent condition. Approximately 10% of adults are diagnosed with dyslexia according to the British Dyslexia Foundation in 2023. Back at the lunch table, Ryan has misconceptions around dyslexia which Kelly and Madesh try to address.

THINK (10 minutes discussion)

Dyslexia is a learning difference that affects reading, writing, language processing and other cognitive skills. People with dyslexia frequently exhibit exceptional abilities in areas such as 3D visual thinking, verbal skills and long-term memory.

How do the group feel we can support colleagues in the workplace? Answers should include.

Provide clear instructions. Clear and concise instructions written in simple language and using bullet points or headings to break up information.

Provide accommodations. Assistive technologies such as text-to-speech software, printed materials in larger and dyslexia-friendly fonts in written communication might all help. Many of the best text-to-speech programs are using AI. Tools like Chat-GTP can help dyslexics improve their writing by providing real-time suggestions and corrections. With AI assistance, dyslexics can focus on the content of their writing instead of worrying about spelling and grammar errors.

Encourage verbal communication. Meetings or phone calls can be a more effective way to communicate important information.

REMEMBER

People with dyslexia can have strengths in visual thinking, creativity and storytelling but find reading, writing and language processing challenging. Support someone with dyslexia at work by providing assistive technologies such as text-to-speech software and use dyslexia-friendly fonts in written communication.

FILM 4 – AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD)

LOOK (play video, 3 minutes)

Set the scene for the team before showing the final video clip. Mark is autistic and has unique skills and abilities that he can offer in the workplace. His colleagues just need to learn more about his preferred style of communication, so that they can adjust to suit Mark's way of working.

THINK (10 minutes discussion)

Explain that ASD used to be split into groupings including autistic disorder, Asperger's disorder and pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified. However, these diagnoses are now collapsed into a single ASD diagnosis with a range of severity along the "spectrum".

There are around 700,000 people diagnosed with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in the UK, but only around 16% of those people are in full time employment. People with neurological conditions are often overlooked for jobs in the fear that employers will need to make major adjustments or to avoid the possibility of difficult or awkward working conditions. However, they are often more logical, analytical thinkers and have good attention to detail as well as an eye for spotting patterns. These are all great characteristics for a number of roles, particularly in data-driven industries.

Ask the group to discuss these two questions.

How can you help colleagues on the ASD spectrum work more efficiently with you?

The answer is that you can help colleagues on the ASD spectrum to work more efficiently with you by finding out and adapting to suit their preferred communication methods. Communicating only through email or using face-to-face meetings when delivering lots of data are generally a bad idea.

How does having a neurodivergent condition, such as autism affect a person's working abilities?

The answer is that you can't assume that someone will be affected in a particular way. Each person is affected differently, so the only way to understand this is to ask them about it. People with ASD will often have challenges with social communication, not always picking up on facial expressions or body language. You may need ask directly what works for them in social interactions, don't rely on your own experiences as a template.

What needs to be recognised are the unique abilities that can come with thinking differently. People with neurological conditions experience the world differently, which provides new perspectives that can be useful in problem-solving.

REMEMBER

Create safe spaces where you can openly discuss people's different communication styles and be willing to adapt to suit your colleagues. Make unwritten rules more explicit and clarify professional and social expectations. Finally, explore, rather than make assumptions about, what people can do.

GROUP EXERCISE

The objective of this quiz is to get the group to confirm their understanding of the content and to recognise the strengths and benefits of neurodiverse colleagues.

Quiz

Neurodiversity is all about...?

The different ways a person's brain processes information.

Difficulty acquiring mathematical skills.

Having trouble concentrating.

What does the H in ADHD stand for?

Hyperactivity.

Hyper-focus.

Helpfulness.

Hyper-sensitivity.

Which one of the following is not an example of a difficulty someone with ADHD may experience in the workplace?

Time management.

Distractibility.

Difficulty with teamwork.

Creative thinking.

How does having a neurodivergent condition such as autism affect a person's working abilities?

They are less able to concentrate for long periods of time.

They prefer to communicate through text-based systems.

They have a more creative way of thinking and problem solving.

Each person is affected differently so you need to find out by asking them.

Among adults, dyslexia is the most common type of neurodivergent condition. Approximately what percentage of adults are diagnosed with dyslexia?

1%

10%

25%

50%