

Tipsheet on Neurodiversity Inclusion

What is neurodiversity?

“Neurodiversity describes the natural way that people think, learn, perceive the world, interact, and process information differently.”

What does neurodivergent mean?

“Neurodivergent people include autistic people; people with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other mental health conditions; and people with learning disabilities. This group also includes people with other intellectual and developmental disabilities and a wide range of conditions that can shape thinking, learning, and perceiving the world. In contrast, people whose brains and nervous systems function “typically” are known as neurotypical people.” (Definition from the *Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion*).

Neurodivergent clients and colleagues may require certain accommodations. Neurodivergent people can often experience barriers in many environments, including the workplace, in medical settings, and in educational environments. Things like workspaces with excessive noise and interruptions, bright fluorescent lighting, information provided in only one way (e.g., verbal without also written instructions), and excessive social demands are all examples of barriers that autistic people may face.

Neurodivergent people also bring a wide array of strengths, talents and diversity of thought to a team. According to the Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion, these skills and talents may include:

- “Innovation and creativity
- Technical, design, and creative strengths
- New ways to solve problems
- High levels of concentration

- Keen accuracy and ability to detect errors
- Strong recall of information and detailed factual knowledge
- Reliability and persistence
- Ability to excel at work that is routine or repetitive in nature”

Here is a list of tips to help make an inclusive environment for neurodiverse people who may use/access your space.

Attend to sensory environments: provide quiet areas, access to natural lighting, and, if possible, remote work or appointment options.

Provide clear instructions and/or tell people what to expect for a meeting or visit in advance: it can be helpful to provide visual aids as well as written instructions. If possible, instructions via audio recording could be helpful for some people. Providing written summaries of meetings and/or appointments could also be helpful.

Use positive language: focus on strengths and abilities, not stereotypes and deficits. Person-first language is commonly used (e.g., a person with autism, a person with a disability), but please note that many people in the disability community prefer to be referred to as autistic, or disabled (known as identity-first language). When in doubt, ask how a person likes to be described. *Read more about person-first and identity-first language here.*

Training and education: offer staff training and education on neurodiversity to help prepare them to better include neurodiverse staff and/or clients.

For more information on helpful accommodations for neurodiversity, check out this website: *Job Accommodation Network*