north east autism society



Employer's Toolkit

April 2025

Since 2019, the North East Autism Society has been passionately campaigning for autism acceptance, rather than awareness. And every year we encourage as many businesses as possible across the region to get involved and join us on our mission.

Your pack contains:
Helpful resources covering everything from 'what is autism?' to the Equality Act, as well as tips for making reasonable adjustments to help your business to become more inclusive this Autism Acceptance Week and beyond.

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What is Autism?

Autism is the word used to describe a lifelong difference in a person's neurology. It's very difficult to say exactly what 'it' is because it can't be separated from the person.

Edinburgh university describe it as: "A way of being in the world; it's a way of processing the things that come into your body (sights and sounds and so on). It affects how you perceive and interact with people. There will also be differences in how you plan and manage activities, and organising that information can translate into different behaviour."

In essence, an autistic person will see, process and understand the world in a different way from someone who isn't autistic, for all of their life.

Historically the focus on autism has been through the language of 'impairments' and deficits, instead of differences or even skills and abilities.

We at the North East Autism Society have had to change the way we think and as a result, the work that we do, with most of this stemming from listening to and working with autistic people, who have been the voices consistently missing from the autism narrative.

Without denying challenge, our aim has been to help the wider world shift to understand and accept those of us who are autistic.

In the UK, just 29 per cent of autistic adults aged 16 to 64 are currently in employment.

Neurodiversity explained

Neurodiversity is more than just a term – it's both a fact - and a movement.

It's the belief that all 'brain wiring' – or neurological difference - is essentially a normal variation in humanity.

Like biodiversity - neurodiversity understands and sees wonder in the fact that differences exist, but doesn't place more or less value on these different variations. In a nutshell - we're all in this together.

No more us and them.



Dyslexia, dyspraxia, autism, ADHD, Tourette Syndrome and many more neurodevelopmental 'differences' would come under this banner, alongside what has traditionally been termed 'neurotypical'.

This helps us understand the complex nature of 'brain wiring' where there is both individuality and overlap; commonalities and difference.

This new understanding helps remove the stigma of deficits and disorders - and with it a toxic cure culture, subjecting people to harmful therapies and treatments in pursuit of an elusive 'normal.'

THIS BETTER WORLD FOR ALL OF US IS POSSIBLE.

WILL YOU JOIN US?

Sensory differences

Our senses help us understand what is happening in the world around is. We all experience messages from our senses differently, and many autistic people can have difficulty processing this sensory information.

That can make them feel overwhelmed, anxious or distressed. It can even be painful.

We have eight senses, and all are vital to how we experience the world and how we react:



Sight. If we struggle to process visual stimuli, we might find it difficult to organise visual information or filter out unnecessary details.



Sound. If we struggle with auditory stimuli, we may have difficulty filtering out back-ground noise.



Touch. If we struggle with tactile stimuli, we may feel certain types of touch as painful or dangerous.



Taste. If we struggle with gustatory stimuli, we may be a picky eater and object to certain food textures.



Smell. If we struggle with olfactory stimuli, we may find smells distracting and over-whelming.



Vestibular – our sense of balance. If we struggle with vestibular processing, we may come across as clumsy.



Proprioception – an awareness of where our body is in space. If we struggle with proprioception, we may have difficulty waiting in line or knowing how hard or soft to push or pull things.



Interoception – our internal body sensations, like hunger, stress, or pain. If we struggle with interoception, we may not be aware that we are thirsty or need the toilet.

Some people are described as **"hyposensitive"** or under-responsive to certain sensory stimuli. They might actively seek sensations by fidgeting, rocking or chewing non-food items.

Meanwhile, others are described as **"hypersensitive"** to certain stimuli, such as loud noises or bright lights. They can be in a constant state of alert, waiting for the next sensory assault.

People can be a mix of both hyper- and hyposensitive to certain senses at the same time.

It is vital to understand that sensory processing difficulties are not a case of simply "liking" or "disliking" things but affect every aspect of life. We must be aware of people's sensory profiles and respectful of how it feels for them.

See
The senses – Autistic advocate Kieran Rose

Sensory - North East Autism Society factsheet

Communication differences

Autistic people may communicate differently to non-autistic people, but it shouldn't be seen as a deficit or a flaw.

Common differences include:

- Understanding non-verbal cues such as facial expressions or gestures
- The speed, pitch or intonation of someone's speech
- Understanding abstract language, humour or sarcasm
- Using other ways to communicate, rather than speech

Research shows that autistic people can communicate well with other autistic people. So rather than seeing the autistic person as having a problem communicating with non-autistic people, we should see it as a shared responsibility to come up with a solution.

This may involve adapting how you communicate, rather than assuming you are automatically right.

You should check you are making sense. A lot of slang words and phrases (like "hang on a minute") do not make sense in a concrete way.

It's important to give someone time and space to process what you are saying. Simply repeating things can be overwhelming.

Be aware that the context – background noise, or someone's emotional or physical state – can affect someone's ability to communicate.

Finally, don't make presumptions. If someone doesn't use speech, it doesn't mean they can't understand what you're saying .. or vice versa.

"As an organisation we've been working with North East Autism Society now for several years and have found their staff to be approachable, friendly and engaging; there's a real warmth from a charity who helps break down the barriers to employment that can sometimes be faced amongst its clients. As a company which cares deeply about supporting neurodivergent individuals, it's been tremendous to have the collaboration and teachings they shared with us, so that we can become better at delivering the services we do."

Wayne Madden, Project Manager, New Enterprise Studios CIC

See
An introduction to the double empathy problem - Autistic advocate Kieran Rose

Communication - North East Autism Society factsheet

Why language matters

As a general rule language, particularly in this field, changes frequently. To make it easier we've pulled together some simple guidance.

WE SAY AUTISTIC

Use 'autistic' not 'has autism'. Also avoid using ASC/ASD and Asperger's Syndrome.

"Autism is not a removable condition, it is central to your being. It's an important aspect of your identity, as much your race gender, job etc."

WE DON'T... USE FUNCTIONING LABELS

Functioning labels are stigmatising and create assumptions. 'High' functioning implies less need and 'low' functioning presumes a lack of competency.

WE ADVOCATE ONE VOICE

Avoid anything that conveys a sense of 'us' and 'them'

When we speak about autistic people we say 'those of us who are autistic'

WE DON'T... SAY LIVING WITH AUTISM

Or People with autism / born with autism.

"Autism isn't a dog that lives with me, or a twin who was born alongside me... it's who I am"

WE TALK ABOUT NEURODIVERGENCE

Neurodivergence isn't another word for autism. We all fall under a banner of neurodiversity. It's about individuals having different brains. Within that though, some of us have typical neurology and others are Neurodivergent in different ways.

WE DON'T... CONVEY PITY

Or suggest that autism is inherently negative.

No using terms like 'suffers from', and avoid talk of deficits.

Never say definitives – ie. Autistic people can't.

What are reasonable adjustments?

The Equality Act (2010) states that all employers must make reasonable adjustments to ensure that workers with disabilities, or physical or mental health conditions, are not substantially disadvantaged when doing their jobs.

By nature, reasonable adjustments are unique and should be tailored to suit the needs of individual employees, within the context of their role and the workplace. Our Employment Futures department regularly supports employers to implement reasonable adjustments in a bid to better support their autistic and neurodivergent employees.

Flexibility

Particularly in larger businesses, the start / end of shifts can result in large crowds of people and, for some, this could be over-whelming. Simply allowing an employee to start or finish their day 15 minutes earlier or later could be enough to alleviate any distress. Another solution could be to offer the use of an alternative entrance or exit route for that individual.



Sensory adjustments

Alternative seating arrangements, fidget toys, ear defenders and movement breaks are all examples of realistic and appropriate adjustments. If your business operates a uniform policy, perhaps consider whether this could be relaxed for those who may struggle with textures or tight-fitting clothing.



Environment

The physical working environment may impact the comfort of some employees. Small adjustments such as allowing staff to choose their own desk could make a positive difference. For those with physical disabilities, adjustments may include the installation of wheelchair ramps, or providing adapted equipment such as chairs and keyboards.



Preparation

Predictability in the workplace reduces anxiety and can give employees a sense of control. For some, last minute changes can cause distress. Where possible, inform employees of any routine changes in advance and try to give staff adequate time to prepare for meetings.



Supporting positive disclosures

Disclosure is a big thing for autistic or neurodivergent individuals. Whether applying for a role or already employed, the choice whether to tell a potential or current employer is often tricky and may create a lot of worry for someone. Disclosing neurodivergence is completely personal and depend on what individuals want to achieve from disclosing.

Our Employment Futures team get questions about disclosure on a regular basis and have created this guide to highlight some common issues around this.

Showing an understanding of neurodivergence

A lot of individuals we work with often wonder whether the organisation they're applying for or work for is neurodiversity friendly. The Disability Confident scheme is a government scheme that is there to publicly recognise employers that are committed to becoming disability or neurodiversity friendly. When searching and applying for jobs, disability confident employers usually have the disability confident logo located on their careers site. This can help individuals in deciding whether or not you to disclose for example.

Will disclosing help during the recruitment process?

Disclosing neurodiversity and talking about it can help with reasonable adjustments during the recruitment process. Reasonable adjustments are the things put in place to support a neurodivergent candidate, and reduce the disadvantages they may face compared to their neurotypical candidates.

Is there a right time for disclosure?

There is no right or wrong time to talk about neurodivergence to a potential or current employee. However, there are many different times you could support. One of the most common times we see is before an interview, as it enables neurodivergent candidates to get reasonable adjustments to help them.

When a candidate or employee discloses:

- Job candidate can ask for reasonable accommodation during the job screening process
- Consider workplace adjustments and supports, including other possible work opportunities within the company
- Treat each autistic person as an individual and not make assumptions about strengths and needs
- Learn more about that individual to ensure they are able to work to their full potential and avoid any discrimination

employment futures

Looking for more help?

If you have any queries regarding Supporting Positive Disclosure and how our services can help, contact us by email: **employment@ne-as.org.uk** OR by phone: **0191 410 9974.**
Online at: **www.ne-as.org.uk/employment-futures**
Find us on Facebook: **@EmploymentFutures**

employment futures

Our Employment Futures team

From humble beginnings as a two-man team in 2016, our Employment Futures provision has gone from strength to strength over the past five years and has provided crucial support to those who face the biggest barriers to employment.

Our experienced team of employment specialists provide personalised support to hundreds of jobseekers each year, regardless of their work history, via a range of free-to-access employment programmes.

From CV writing and interview preparation, to finding suitable work placements and securing long-term employment, the team is on hand to help every step of the way.

Employment Futures also supports local employers with the likes of recruitment, carrying out risk assessments and making reasonable adjustments in the workplace.

Visit the Employment Futures website to find out more.
www.ne-as.org.uk/employment-futures

Become 'Disability Confident'

What is Disability Confident?

Disability Confident is the recruiting, managing and developing people with a disability or health condition. The scheme aims to help employers make the most of opportunities provided by employing and developing disabled people. It is voluntary and has been developed by employers, disabled people's representatives and the government.

How to sign up?

The scheme has three levels that have been designed to support employers on their Disability Confident journey. It is free and easy to sign up.

Scheme members

Scheme members have free access to guidance, peer support groups and specialist events to give them the skills and confidence to employ disabled people. Members also receive accreditation when they join the scheme, including a certificate and Disability Confident badge to use on their website and in recruitment adverts.

Workplace adjustments

Certain aspects or conditions of a job or the workplace can represent a barrier for someone with a disability which can mean they are disadvantaged. Employers have a duty under the Equality Act (link back to section) to make 'reasonable adjustments' for people with a disability if there are any aspects of a job or workplace which put them at a disadvantage. Adjustments are changes that are made to the work environment or the way the work is carried out, so that someone with a disability can do their job more effectively. Where there are costs, financial support may be available for individuals through, for example, the government's Access to Work scheme (see next page).

Disability Confident Leader

As a Disability Confident Leader, we have undergone our own evidenced assessment, delivering against all of the core actions as a Disability Confident Employer. If you intend to undertake your own journey, please get in touch and we can support you in taking action to better record and report on disability, mental health and wellbeing in your workplace.

Contact us

If you have any queries regarding Disability Confident and how our services can help, contact us by
email: **employment@ne-as.org.uk** OR by phone: **0191 410 9974.**
Online at: **www.ne-as.org.uk/employment-futures**
Find us on Facebook: **@EmploymentFutures**

Access to Work

What is Access to Work?

Access to Work is a publicly funded employment support programme. It can help facilitate your employees whose work may be affected by their health or a disability. The scheme provides advice and support to both yourself and your employees. It can also pay for any changes that may need to be made in the workplace or for new equipment to cater for the individual's needs.

How can access to work help?

Access to Work can often help to cover the full cost of:

- Aid and equipment to support your employee
- Adapting equipment to make it easier for your employee to use

Eligibility

Your employee can apply for the Access to Work grant if they're:

- Aged over 16
- Normally resident in, and working in Great Britain
- Diagnosed with a disability or long-term health condition which affect their ability to perform to their full capacity in their job
- Diagnosed with a mental health condition and need extra support in work.

How to apply

The quickest and most convenient way to begin the application is for either you, (with your employee present), or your employee applies online at: **www.gov.uk/access-to-work/apply**
How can Employment Futures help?

All of our staff are highly-trained, experts. They can help your employee find the confidence and skills to succeed in the workplace. An individual already in employment (or about to begin) can access funding for Employment Futures services. Once funding is approved we can provide:

- A meeting with both yourself and your employee to determine any challenges faced
- A bespoke plan on how to break the barriers and ensure success
- Coaching for the individual, in the workplace
- An assessment of the workplace, suggesting reasonable adjustments and practical guidance to support both the individual and also their employer
- Specialist training from our autism experts to large groups within your organisation

Contact us

If you have any queries regarding Disability Confident and how our services can help, contact us by
email: **employment@ne-as.org.uk** OR by phone: **0191 410 9974.**
Online at: **www.ne-as.org.uk/employment-futures**
Find us on Facebook: **@EmploymentFutures**

autism
acceptance



Autism Acceptance Award

The North East Autism Society established the Autism Acceptance Award as a way of recognising organisations that are committed to making a real difference for autistic and neurodivergent individuals.



Since its inception in 2019, we have worked with a number of businesses and organisations across the North-east – and we're always on the lookout for additional corporate partners who can help us to champion our message of acceptance and understanding. Our Autism Acceptance Award is currently open to businesses working within retail, hospitality, leisure and recreation, health and transport.

Our Autism Acceptance Award is split into three phases (bronze, silver and gold) and places a focus on four key areas within an organisation: knowledge and understanding, changes to practice, environmental adjustments and collaboration.





Testimonials

Since Employment Futures was founded, the team has helped hundreds of autistic and neurodivergent individuals on their journey to further education, training or employment, as well as supporting businesses across the region to prioritise equality and diversity within the workplace.

Click on the images below to read some of our success stories.



"Working with the North East Autism Society means we can continue to celebrate people's differences and unique talents."

Chris James
Fleet Engineer at Stagecoach



"I feel everybody now is more aware and more sensitive to other people."

Tracy Mallam
Production Manager, Clearly Drinks



"I think autistic people can have barriers that make it harder for them to get employment than a neurotypical person. For me it was struggling with social interactions ... the support and guidance I was given really helped to ease my worries."

Callum Jewell
DiversityNE participant

north east **autism** society