10 STEPS to creating a neurodiverse inclusive environment

Neurodiversity includes everybody, whether they're neurotypical (whose neurological functioning falls within the 'average') or neurodivergent (who fall outside this). Examples of neurodivergence include autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and dyspraxia/DCD. This form provides a structure to aid discussion and evaluation of the current environment, with examples to consider on subsequent pages.

AREAS FOR CONSIDERATION	Considered for everyone?	Current arrangements	Is diagnosis/ disclosure required for adaptations?
The sensory environment	Yes ☐ No ☐		Yes ☐ No ☐
The timely environment	Yes ☐ No ☐		Yes ☐ No ☐
The explicit environment	Yes ☐ No ☐		Yes ☐ No ☐
The predictable environment	Yes ☐ No ☐		Yes ☐ No ☐
The social environment	Yes ☐ No ☐		Yes ☐ No ☐
Disclosing diagnosis	Yes ☐ No ☐		Yes ☐ No ☐
Project management	Yes ☐ No ☐		Yes ☐ No ☐
Communication styles	Yes ☐ No ☐		Yes ☐ No ☐
Well-being and work-life balance	Yes ☐ No ☐		Yes ☐ No ☐
Trouble-shooting	Yes ☐ No ☐		Yes ☐ No ☐

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Neurodiversity includes everybody, whether they're neurotypical (whose neurological functioning falls within the 'average') or neurodivergent (who fall outside this). Examples of neurodivergence include autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and dyspraxia/DCD. The following pages are designed to provoke discussion in areas that may not previously have considered.

A. ADAPTING THE ENVIRONMENT

1. The sensory environment

Does everyone have a place to work where they feel comfortable? Are the ambient sounds, smells, and visuals tolerable? Is the lighting suitable? What about uncomfortable tactile stimuli? Has room layout been considered? Can any steps be taken to create a more comfortable work environment? Can ear defenders, computer screen filters or room dividers be made freely available for those who need them? Have individual environmental sensitivities been considered – e.g. strong perfume – and do others understand why this matters?

2. The timely environment

Has appropriate time been allowed for tasks? Allowing time to reflect upon tasks and address them accordingly will maximise success. Are time scales realistic? Have they been discussed? Are there explicit procedures if tasks are finished early or require additional time? Are requests to do things quickly kept to a minimum with the option to opt out of having to respond rapidly?

3. The explicit environment

Is everything required in a task made explicit? Are some tasks based upon implicit understanding which draw upon social norms or typical expectations? Is it clear which tasks should be prioritised over others? Avoid being patronising but checking that everything has been made explicit will reduce confusion later. Is there an explicit procedure for asking questions should they arise e.g. a named person (a mentor) to ask in the first instance?

4. The predictable environment

How predictable is the environment? Is it possible to maximise predictability? Uncertainty can be anxiety provoking and a predictable environment can help in reducing this and enable greater task focus. Can regular meetings be set up? Is it possible that meetings may have to be cancelled in the future? Are procedures clear for when expected events (such as meetings) are cancelled, with a rationale for any alterations? Can resources and materials be sent in advance?

5. The social environment

Does the environment have social occasions and is everyone keen / reluctant to participate? Are there essential social occasions? Can group activities be adjusted to enable everyone to take part – e.g. issuing a clear invitation to a specific, time-bound event. Does everyone in the environment recognise that a reluctance to engage socially does not imply dislike or rudeness? Would people benefit from having a traffic-light system (e.g. green, yellow or red post-it notes) to signal their willingness to interact and / or current stress level?

By thinking of 'Reasonable Adjustment STEPS', you can consider the extent to which the environment is Sensory, Timely, Explicit, Predictable, and Social. Supporting the individual is on the next page.

B. SUPPORTING INDIVIDUALs

6. Disclosing diagnosis

Are people willing to disclose any diagnoses to colleagues, and if so, how would they like to manage this? Would people who work with the individual benefit from training, or an opportunity to ask questions? If so, can a trusted, independent person be brought in to orchestrate an open and friendly discussion? If the individual does disclose to their colleagues, are they also willing for those colleagues to share the information more widely, or is this privileged information? Using autism as an example, - if and when autism comes up in conversation, what language does the person prefer? (e.g., autistic person, Aspie, autistic, person with autism).

7. Project management

Does anyone experience difficulties with planning, flexibility, sustained attention or inertia? What exacerbates these difficulties and how can they be minimised? Are there digital tools (e.g. time management apps, shared calendars) which can provide extra structure to the project? Which staff member's preferred planning system is non-linear (e.g. mind maps, sketch notes) or linear (e.g. gantt chart, "to do" list) and can this be accommodated? Which people prefer to be immersed in a specific topic or task, or to have a selection of different tasks / intermediate deadlines – and can this preference be built into the project work plan?

8. Communication styles

Does anyone prefer literal, specific language? And if so, can their line manager / supervisor and colleagues be reminded to use this? Do people prefer written communication, or face-to- face? Is Skype easier than a phone call? Should colleagues be reminded to explain why they are offering a particular comment or piece of advice, as well as offering the comment? Does their line manager / supervisor / colleagues cultivate an atmosphere that enables them to ask for help if needed?

9. Well-being and work-life balance

Are people sleeping and eating well? Are meetings scheduled at times that suit their personal routines? Can they work from home or have more flexible working hours and breaks? Is everyone known to relevant services including disability support or HR? Are they registered with a GP? Do they require disability leave to receive treatment or therapeutic support? Do they need support or advice from external services like Access to Work or Disabled Students Allowance?

10. Trouble-shooting

Do you have 1-2-1s with everyone to discuss what is working well and what isn't? Are there coping strategies that they use in other settings that could be used or adapted here? Could tasks falling within the job role or course be altered? Or could work be shared between workers so each can play to their strengths? Work together to come up with new solutions to difficulties that haven't been solved, and address new difficulties should they arise.

These STEPS were based upon and adapted from the work of the Centre for Applied Autism Research (go.bath.ac.uk/caar), and Natalie Jenkins + Sue Fletcher-Watson (http://dart.ed.ac.uk/supporting-autistic-people-in-he/). Any comments/feedback? Please email CAAR@Bath.ac.uk