



An estimated 1 out of 7 people in the UK are neurodivergent and yet 70% of those individuals don't share their diagnosis for fear of a bad reaction. Titles such as Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Dyscalculia, Autism, ADHD and Tourette's Syndrome can leave managers and colleagues treading on eggshells and the person with the diagnosis feeling labelled or judged. The reality is that one size does not fit all – although there may be some commonalities in the strengths and challenges experienced by people with a particular condition, every human being is unique.



## SO, HOW DO WE BEST MANAGE NEURODIVERSITY?

I am no medical expert but, having been involved in many conversations around this subject recently, it seems to me that the best way for managers to support any kind of diversity in their team is to show curiosity, a willingness to adapt one's style and to have open and honest conversations. Basically, to be a great manager and leader, recognising each person's strengths and helping them perform at their best.

### 1. CLARITY IS CRITICAL

To perform at their best every team member, whether they be neurotypical or neurodivergent, needs to understand:

- what we're trying to achieve together
- what their key responsibilities are and how their success is measured
- what behaviour is expected around here (including the unwritten rules, like what time everyone tends to arrive in the office, what happens on birthdays, etc.)
- how they are contributing to all these expectations and whether there is anything missing in their performance

Be careful here not to be in 'transmit' mode. You may feel you've explained it clearly but how have you checked each person's understanding?

### 2. CONFIDENCE IMPACTS PERFORMANCE

Each team member needs to feel confident that they can achieve all of these expectations. Ask questions to check their level of confidence or how they plan to get started. 'Is that all okay?' isn't going to cut it here.

They also need to feel confident in their relationships with others – with you as their manager, with their team and any key stakeholders. There is much you can do to help with this, particularly through describing social norms in your team and expectations around communication. Don't let people fall foul of traditions that haven't been clearly explained or are perhaps outdated.

Boost confidence by helping people connect the dots between what they are doing and business or organisational outcomes, so they understand the difference they are making.

### 3. DEMONSTRATING CURIOSITY

This involves:

- avoiding assumptions
- not having a fixed agenda
- being fully present
- actively listening
- asking open questions to understand the other person's viewpoint or experience.

If it's hard for you to tick those boxes, what's getting in the way? And what difference would it make to the effectiveness of your conversations and relationships if you could demonstrate these skills?

### 4. ADAPTING YOUR STYLE

Authenticity is important but it's not an excuse for saying 'that's just the way I am'.

As a manager and leader, although it's important to be consistent so people know where they stand with you, you need to adjust your style so you can support and appropriately challenge the diverse array of people in your team.

## UNDERSTANDING MORE ABOUT NEURODIVERSITY

Demonstrating effective management skills will go a long way in helping you work with neurodiverse colleagues. If you would like more practical tips around how to support various conditions take a look at the following resources:

<https://www.acas.org.uk/archive/neurodiversity>    [ND Resource Hub - Neurodiversity in Business](#)    [Passionate about Neurodiversity - Genius Within](#)

*Thanks to Claire Merritt, Partner in the Employment Team at Paris Smith LLP, for sharing these valuable resources.*