

Supporting Neurodiverse Staff & Students

A guide for inclusive working and learning at Warwick

Created collaboratively by the University of Warwick's Neurodiversity Champions, this guide is designed to help all departments create more inclusive, flexible, and supportive environments. It offers practical tips for supporting neurodiverse colleagues and students and can also be shared by individuals to help inform peers, line managers, or teams.

We recognise that neurodiversity is not a limitation, but a reflection of the natural variation in human thinking and experience. Every neurodivergent person is unique, and the most effective support starts with a simple yet powerful approach:

Ask the person what they need to work, learn, or contribute at their best.

Collaborative and individualised support plans, developed through open, respectful conversations, are often the most impactful way to ensure colleagues and students feel heard, valued, and empowered. For those newly diagnosed, this process may be unfamiliar and exploratory. They may not yet know what helps or hinders them, and what works may shift over time as they better understand their needs.

Many individuals have masked their challenges for years, sometimes without realising it, so diagnosis can mark the beginning of their self-discovery, not the end. Patience, flexibility, and space for trial and error are essential to allow that person to unlearn, experiment, and begin showing up as their most confident self.

1. Personalised Support First

- Open the conversation: Ask "*What helps you work best?*" rather than making assumptions.
- Tailor adjustments: Co-create solutions together - what works for one person may not work for another.
- Expect it to evolve: Needs may change as individuals learn more about themselves or discover strategies that better support them.
- Respect privacy: Keep the tone supportive and confidential, without pressure to disclose diagnoses.

2. Adapting Documents

- Use clear structure, bullet points, and consistent formatting.
- Choose sans-serif fonts (e.g. Arial, Calibri) and 12pt+ text size.
- Ensure high colour contrast and avoid relying on colour alone for meaning.
- Provide documents in advance where possible.

3. Making Presentations More Accessible

- Keep slides simple and consistent.
- Use minimal text, supported by verbal explanation.
- Include relevant, non-distracting visuals and diagrams.
- Avoid flashing content or distracting animations.

4. Inclusive Language and Communication

- Include a meeting agenda when sending out the invitation to help attendees prepare and stay focused.
- Use literal and direct language without assumed knowledge.
- Avoid idioms, sarcasm, or figures of speech that may be misunderstood.
- Offer written summaries of meetings or instructions.
- Confirm understanding in a respectful way—don't assume confusion is disinterest.
- Avoid using acronyms and abbreviations where possible.
- Be mindful of tone – and how it may be received. Neurodivergent individuals may communicate in a more direct or blunt style without intending to be rude and may also find overly firm or confrontational tones stressful. Aim for clarity, kindness, and mutual understanding.
- Use words like “urgent” and “mandatory” thoughtfully. These terms can trigger anxiety or stress if overused. Reserve them for situations that genuinely require immediate action or compulsory involvement to avoid unnecessary pressure.

- Be mindful of your tone and word choice - aim for clarity and respect to avoid sounding unintentionally confrontational, as this can heighten sensitivities.

5. Flexible and Supportive Ways of Working

- Allow flexibility in working styles and deadlines where possible.
- Offer quiet spaces and minimal-stimulation environments.
- Understand that routines, change, or sensory factors can greatly affect wellbeing and performance.
- Recognise energy levels may fluctuate throughout the day or week.

6. Supporting Neurodiverse Staff

- Encourage open, non-judgemental conversations about support needs, and create space to ask or answer clarifying questions.
- Acknowledge different preferences in working and communicating, whether by email, MS Teams, or in person. While not all preferences can be met, simply asking what works best makes a difference.
- Be flexible with how, when, and where work gets done, especially during periods of sensory overload or reduced focus.
- Signpost to available support, such as Mental Health First Aiders, HR, or the Neurodiversity Champions.
- Ensure line managers understand their role in enabling inclusive practice and seek guidance where needed.
- Consider desk preferences, some staff may need a quieter space, adjusted lighting, or seating away from high-traffic areas.

7. Supporting Neurodiverse Students

- Offer clear assignment briefs and expectations.
- Use recorded lectures and provide slides in advance.
- Encourage peer mentoring or buddy systems.

- Offer quiet spaces for study and breaks.

8. General Good Practice

- Provide optional training for staff and students on neurodiversity awareness.
- Share feedback opportunities for neurodivergent individuals to improve services and spaces.
- Collaborate with individuals to make ongoing adjustments, it's a continuous dialogue, not a one-off fix.
- Avoid cancelling meetings at the last minute without explanation and try not to make unexpected calls—this can be unsettling for some people. A quick heads-up or rescheduling note helps maintain trust and reduces anxiety.

By building environments where support is tailored, respectful, and inclusive, we can enable everyone, neurodivergent or not, to contribute their full potential to our shared success.

Examples of Reasonable Adjustments

The following are examples submitted by members of Warwick's Neurodiversity Support Staff Group. These can serve as a reference for conversations between neurodivergent individuals and their line managers or colleagues. Remember: needs vary from person to person, and adjustments should always be tailored through open dialogue.

- Use of noise-cancelling headphones or earplugs in noisy environments
- Option to opt out of team social events
- Flexible travel times to avoid rush hour stress
- Flexibility in start and finish times
- Hybrid working arrangements, or working from home arrangements
- Desk privacy boards (which also help reduce noise)
- Regular movement or sensory regulation breaks
- Extra time to process information when needed

- Permission to take detailed notes during meetings to aid memory
- Agendas shared in advance, especially for full-day or intensive meetings
- Access to low-sensory or quiet rooms when needed
- Consistent access to an allocated desk space
- Opportunities to clarify instructions and ask questions
- Scheduled breaks during longer meetings to reset focus
- Written instructions or time to write things down during conversations
- Use of fidget tools or sensory items for focus and comfort
- Access to AI meeting summaries (e.g. Microsoft Co-Pilot 365 or Teams Premium) to support memory and attention
(Licences available at an additional cost via IDG)

These adjustments aim to reduce barriers and enable neurodivergent colleagues to thrive in their roles. When in doubt, simply ask what would be most supportive and check in regularly.

Need support or want to know more?

- Email the Neurodiversity Champions: **ndchampions@warwick.ac.uk**
- Library accessibility resources: warwick.ac.uk/library/accessibility
- For staff supporting students: [Neurodiversity Toolkit](#)
- Workplace adjustments: [link to the staff adjustments information](#)
- Unsure who your ED&I contact is? Ask your **HR People Partner**.
- In an emergency, contact **Community Safety** on **024 7652 2222**