



Supporting Neurodiversity in Construction

Toolbox Talk for Managers and Supervisors



Our Legal Obligation

- When it comes to neurodiversity, employers have a legal obligation to make sure that individuals are not discriminated against (Equality Act, 2010).
- The act also entails that employers are obligated to facilitate “reasonable adjustments” for employees with disabilities to ensure accessibility and inclusion.

What is Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity refers to variations among human brains. Each person processes information, learns and behaves differently.

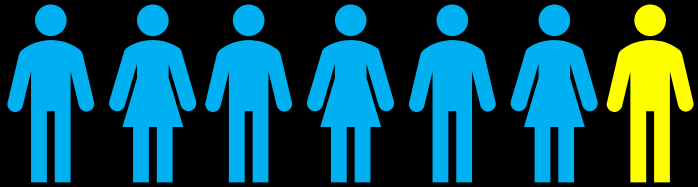
Most people have **neurotypical** brains.

Others have brains that have pronounced strengths and weaknesses.

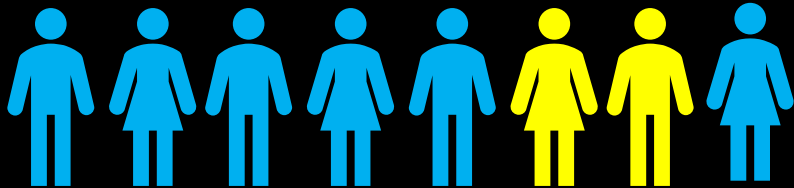
These can be called **neurodivergent, neurodiverse, neurodistinct, neurospicy**, or they may want to be identified as their **diagnosis condition**, e.g. “**I am dyslexic.**”

The Statistics

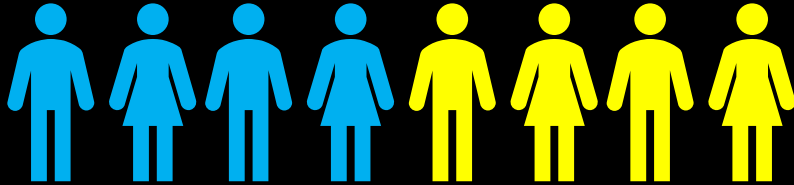
You or the person next to you may be neurodivergent.



1 IN 7 PEOPLE IN THE UK are neurodivergent



1 IN 4 PEOPLE IN CONSTRUCTION believe they are or may be neurodivergent



Some studies suggest around **HALF OF SITE WORKERS, QSs and PROJECT MANAGERS** believe they are or may be neurodivergent

Within Construction, the most common diagnoses are:

ADHD (54%)

Dyslexia (32%)

Autism (32 %)

Dyslexia (1 in 10 people) – **1 in 10 in construction (1 in 5 on site?)**

ADHD (1 in 20 people) – but with many more undiagnosed – **1 in 8 in construction (1 in 4 on site?)**

Autism (1 in 100 people) – **1 in 10 in construction (1 in 5 on site?)**

Neurodiverse Umbrella

- Neurodiversity is often used as an umbrella term referring to several conditions, all of which should be supported.
- Different conditions have different impacts, which can also differ from person to person.
- It's important to understand conditions generally but also what their unique impact is for individuals
- Neurodivergent people may have multiple conditions.
- They may occur alongside other conditions (co-morbidity)



Applied Conditions

Dyslexia
Dyspraxia
Dysgraphia
Dyscalculia

Clinical Conditions

ADHD
Autism
Tourette Syndrome
Learning Disability

Acquired (transient)

Depression
Anxiety
OCD
Phobias
Chronic Fatigue

Acquired (chronic)

Chronic Pain
Chronic Fatigue
Long Covid
Multiple Sclerosis
Brain Injury
And others...

Co-occurring Conditions

Neurological Conditions

- Epilepsy and Seizure Disorders
- Functional Neurological Disorders (FND)
- Structural Neurological Anomalies

Gastrointestinal Issues

- Coeliac Disease
- Other GI Problems

Sleep Disorders

- Obstructive Sleep Apnoea
- Hypersomnia

Mental Health Conditions

- Anxiety / Depression
- Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

Chronic Pain and Chronic Fatigue Conditions

- Migraines
- Fibromyalgia
- ME/CFS – Chronic Fatigue Syndrome
- Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome (EDS)

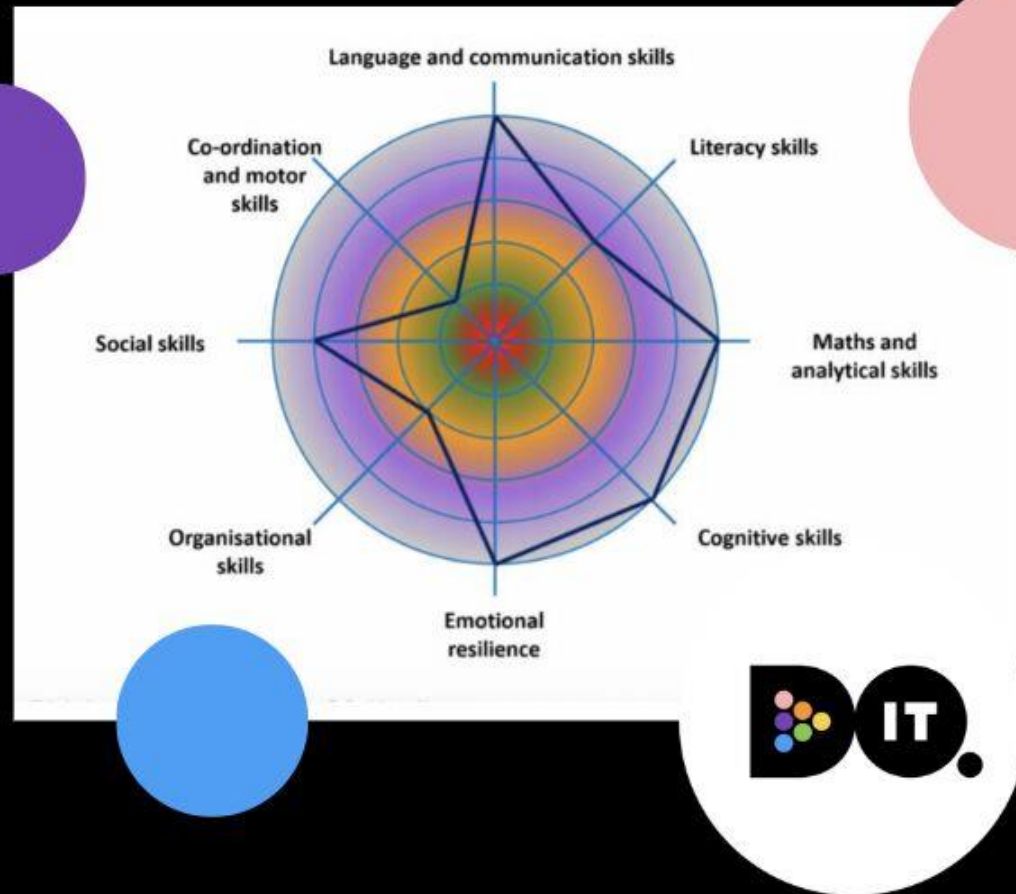
Other Conditions

- Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD)
- Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA) – also known as Pervasive Drive for Autonomy
- Rejection Sensitivity Disorder (RSD)
- Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD)
- Endometriosis
- Intensified Menopause

Spikes not Spectrum

- Neurodivergent individuals may excel in certain areas while struggling in others, creating a profile that looks "spiky" when visualized.
- This is different from neurotypical profiles, which tend to have a more balanced distribution of skills.

We all have strengths and some challenges
What's your spiky profile?



The Benefits of Neurodivergence

- **Special Interests** – You know all the facts and figures and understand your job in great detail
- **3D Thinking** - You can look at 2D plans, drawings and blue prints and see them in 3D in their final form
- **Spatial Awareness** - You have good spatial awareness and understand how multiple components fit together
- **Seeing the big picture** - You understand the entire build process and your role in it.
- **Memory** - You have a good memory for facts or figures.
- **Creativity** - You have innovative ideas and can think outside the box, finding solutions to any problems that arise
- **Pattern Recognition** - You recognise patterns and see and solve problems before issues arise
- **Methodical** - You are methodical, hard working and find quick, reliable ways of doing things
- **Attention to Detail** - You have great attention to detail and produce a high quality finish
- **Enjoyment** - You like working on you own or outside and enjoy working on site. You have energy and enthusiasm
- **Caring** – You take pride in what you do, are empathetic, and understand that you are building homes for people to live in.

The Challenges of Neurodivergence

- **Social Interactions:** Difficulty interpreting social cues, understanding nonverbal communication, and forming and maintaining relationships are common challenges.
- **Sensory Processing:** Over- or under-reactivity to sensory stimuli like sound, light, touch, taste, and smell can lead to sensory overload or difficulty focusing.
- **Communication:** Struggling with reading, writing, speaking or listening. Challenges with verbal and nonverbal communication, including understanding sarcasm, idioms, and social conventions.
- **Executive Functions:** Challenges with planning, organizing, time management, and prioritizing tasks can affect academic performance, employment, and daily routines.
- **Caring Roles:** Genetic and social factors mean that neurodiverse people may be caring for family or friends who are also neurodivergent or have related conditions.
- **Dysregulation:** Variable levels of dopamine and noradrenaline can lead to hyperfocus and lack of focus – good days and bad days
- **Emotional Regulation:** Difficulty managing emotions, particularly in stressful situations, can lead to meltdowns, anxiety, and depression.
- **Mental Health:** Neurodivergent individuals may be more likely to experience mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, and difficulties with social interaction, which can impact their quality of life.
- **Neurological Health:** Masking, anxiety and increased flight or fight responses can lead to chronic pain and fatigue, functional neurological disorders, muscle spasm and tics.
- **Unhealthy coping strategies:** You may be trying to manage your symptoms with drug and alcohol, particularly if you don't have an official diagnosis or support for your neurodivergence.

Neurodivergent people deserve support

If you are surrounded by neurodivergent people at work, at home and socially, then you may start thinking that neurodivergence is the norm and start questioning why you are finding it so hard.

- **Everyone around you may be struggling to fit in and may be masking.**
- **Your struggles are real and unique to you. Your need for help is genuine.**
- **You are still a minority in the wider scheme of things – only 15-20% of people overall are neurodivergent,**
- **Talking about and recognising the challenges and benefits of neurodivergence, and how common it is in construction, could make all the difference.**
- **Neurodivergent people should be able to talk about their struggles, knowing that they are not alone.**



1
Focus on individual learning and support



2
Offer flexibility



3
Support with planning and organisation



4
Support with adapting the working environment



5
Tailor communication methods



6
Collaborate and learn from your team



7
Create predictability and routine



8
Adapt timeframes and deadlines



9
Communicate change quickly and clearly



10
Support strengths and interests

To find out more:
<https://www.matesinmind.org/>

How to Support Your Team

Accept

- Believe their reality and lived experience

Embrace

- Embrace Neurodiversity

Educate

- Educate Yourself & Your Team

Get Help

- Seek Professional Guidance

Listen

- Avoid Stereotyping & Judgement

Educate

- Educate Your Team

What Help is Available?

Talk to your supervisor or contract manager if you are struggling.

Let us know if there is anything that would make your life on site easier.

- **Construction Industry Helpline:** Provides a 24/7 safety net for all construction workers and their families
- **ADHD Foundation:** The UK's largest user-led neurodiversity charity, offering support for conditions like ADHD, autism, dyslexia, and Tourette's syndrome.
- **The Neurodivergent Collective:** Provides support in areas such as employment, wellbeing, and burnout recovery, and their team is made up of neurodivergent individuals.
- **National Autistic Society:** Support and resources for autistic people and includes links to services for neurodivergent individuals.
- **The Society for Neurodiversity (S4Nd):** An organisation supporting people who identify as neurodivergent, and their families and allies.
- **Daisy Chain:** Offers strategies and support for neurodivergent adults with ADHD, autism, FASD, sensory processing differences, anxiety, and social communication differences.
- **Neurodiversity Hub:** Offers resources specifically for students and employers to support neurodivergent individuals in the workplace.
- **ADHD UK:** By people with ADHD for people with ADHD.
- **ADHD Girls UK:** Focuses on women and AuDHD (Autism and ADHD) individuals.