

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Working When Neurodivergent

Many organizations are good at working to make sure they are accessible to employees with physical disabilities but some still struggle with accommodating neurodivergent people.

This situation is changing, but it can be difficult for employees whose brains learn, function, or process information differently than the majority of people to request reasonable changes to enable them to thrive and deliver their best. Additionally, some neurodivergent people may not be open about their needs because they're worried about being judged or discriminated against even when their rights are protected under law.

As a neurodivergent person, you may want to educate yourself on what your company already does to support a neurodiverse workforce. Additionally, this article will walk you through the process of deciding who to tell about your condition if you choose to disclose it.

Support at work

You may find that your company already has programs and procedures in place to raise awareness of neurodiversity and support neurodivergent employees. These might include things like:

- a neurodiversity network
- ·neurodiversity champions
- mental health first aiders or champions
- an assistance program with counsellors trained to help neurodivergent people

The first place to look for these programs will be on your company's intranet or in the company handbook. If you can't find anything there, then you should speak to your human resources (HR) representative.

Speaking to your manager

Whether or not you wish to tell people about being a neurodivergent person is your decision. However, there are some benefits to disclosing your condition to your manager that you may want to consider.

Before you're hired

Telling prospective employers during the recruitment process that you are neurodivergent can help the interviewer make adjustments such as changing the format of the interview. This will give you a fair opportunity to show your skills and experience.

Once you're working

Disclosing that you are a neurodivergent person after you are employed can make it easier for your manager to provide the support and the reasonable adjustments that you—and other neurodivergent employees—may need to deliver your best work. Ask for flexibility with reviewing your accommodations from time to time in case your needs change, and explain that this can help you make sure that you can continue being successful at work.

Before you do speak to your manager, however, it might help to talk through your approach to the subject with someone you trust and who knows you well. If the person you practice with works with

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you, you might ask them to be present for the meeting with your manager so they can support you. You may also want to speak to a counsellor at your assistance program who can talk you through different things you may want to raise in this meeting.

If you feel overwhelmed at work

If you are concerned that you may feel overwhelmed or distressed at work, there are some things you can do.

Know your triggers and possible solutions. If you know that loud environments can sometimes be difficult for you, think about where or when you might experience these in your workspace and try to find alternative spaces to work or use noise-cancelling headphones. If you work from home and find navigating social situations difficult without being see someone's reactions, ask if you can hold your meetings via video call.

Identify a place you can go if you feel overwhelmed. Is there a quiet office that you can step into? Is there a park near your workspace that you can walk around to remove yourself from the situation that is causing you distress?

Speak to your manager about what you wish to do when you feel overwhelmed. If you feel comfortable, have an honest discussion with your manager about what might help you in these situations.

Deciding to tell your co-workers

As with deciding to speak to your manager, telling your co-workers that you are neurodivergent person is your decision.

If you decide to tell your co-workers, you may want to start small. Think about who you trust and are closest to at work and speak to them first in a private conversation. You may choose to discuss the specific cognitive differences you experience as a neurodivergent person and the skills that this gives you in the workplace. If you would like your co-worker not to share the details of your discussions, remind them that you would like to tell others on your own time.

If you have decided to tell your manager but not your co-workers, be sure to ask your manager to respect your decision. However, be aware that for some reasonable adjustments to be put in place, some others may need to be told about your condition. In this case, your manager should discuss and agree with you on matters, such as:

- who will be told
- what you do and don't want them to know
- who will do the telling, where, when, and how
- whether you will be present

Remember, a neurodiverse workforce is an asset that all companies can benefit from because of valuable skills and unique perspectives that neurodivergent people bring to their companies.