



Neurodiverse Workplaces

A Manager's Toolkit

Prepared by Specialisterne Canada for the
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Neurodiverse Workplaces Welcome

Welcome to Neurodiverse Workplaces – A Manager’s Toolkit. This guide is designed to support you in creating a supportive and productive environment for neurodivergent and neurotypical individuals on your team.

Whether you’re enhancing your onboarding processes, refining communication strategies, exploring workplace accommodations, or considering job coaching, this toolkit provides practical insights and actionable steps to empower your management approach.

As you engage with the toolkit, you’ll find scenarios, insights, actions, and hands-on tools to enhance your team’s inclusivity.

Let’s get started!

Key Terms

Key terms used throughout this toolkit.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Commonly known as ADHD, this is a life-long neurodevelopmental condition that is characterized by levels of inattention and hyperactivity that interfere with daily life.

Autism

A life-long neurodevelopmental disability characterized by differences in social interaction and communication as well as differences in patterns of thought and/or behaviour.

Disability

Any impairment, including a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication, or sensory impairment - or functional limitation - whether permanent, temporary, or episodic in nature, or evident or not, that, in interaction with a barrier hinders a person's full and equal participation in society.¹

Identity-First Language

Puts a person's disability first in the description (e.g., Marianne is autistic).

Intellectual Disability

Intellectual disability is a lifelong neurodevelopmental condition characterized by variations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviour.

Learning Disability

An umbrella term describing a life-long disability that impacts how someone learns new skills and applies those skills in day-to-day life. Types of learning disabilities include dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, dyspraxia, and non-verbal.

¹ Accessible Canada Act. (2019). <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/a-0.6/>

Neurodivergent

Neurodivergent is a term used to describe individuals whose neurological development and functioning differs from what society considers "normal". This can include conditions like ADHD, autism, and other variations in brain function. Remember: When we talk about being neurotypical or neurodivergent, it's important to know that these are big groups, and the range of functioning can vary widely within each group.

Neurodiversity

The concept that there is natural diversity in how all human brains (neurotypical and neurodivergent) are wired and work.

Neurotypical

Neurotypical is a term referring to individuals whose neurological development and functioning align with what society considers as "normal". It is often used in contrast to neurodivergent, which includes individuals with neurological differences such as ADHD, autism, or other variations. Remember: When we talk about being neurotypical or neurodivergent, it's important to know that these are big groups, and the range of functioning can vary widely within each group.

Person-First Language

Puts a person before a disability (e.g., "Marianne has autism.").



Employee Onboarding

Employee onboarding is more than just paperwork and introductions—it's a crucial ongoing process of supporting and integrating new hires into your team and organization. By providing clear guidance and flexible support from the start, onboarding sets the stage for success, fostering confidence, productivity, and a sense of belonging among all new employees.



Example Scenario

Manager Alix wants to ensure the onboarding process is comfortable and effective for Jordan, a new neurodivergent team member. To start, Alix evaluates the existing onboarding process, seeking input from her team. Three key improvements are identified: clearer learning objectives, updated on-the-job resources, and increased informal support for new hires.

Alix creates a thorough onboarding roadmap detailing the tasks, expectations, milestones, clarified learning objectives, and available resources. Alix also assigns a supportive peer mentor to help with Jordan's onboarding. Setting clear expectations, Alix shares this roadmap with Jordan in advance and they review it together during his first day so Jordan feels comfortable, and informed. Alix asks Jordan about his preferred learning and communication style, along with potential accommodations.

This structured and flexible approach proves successful. Recognizing the positive impact, Alix decides to implement the same inclusive approach for all new hires, creating a better onboarding experience for everyone.

Insights

Why is orientation not onboarding?

- **Orientation** is typically a few days where the employee does paperwork, reads about the organization, and learns about policies and procedures.
- **Onboarding** is a comprehensive, multi-month process that helps orient, guide, and develop new employees.

Why does well-designed onboarding save time and effort?


- Well-designed and adaptable onboarding processes, such as thorough and clear training manuals, interactive workshops, and personalized coaching sessions, require initial preparation. However, in the medium and long term, they save time and financial resources.
- Well-designed onboarding processes and concrete expectation-setting go hand-in-hand. This clarity minimizes confusion and reduces the likelihood of misunderstandings later on.
- This helps instill confidence, create a positive first impression, and foster a sense of belonging and commitment among new employees.

Why is successful onboarding considered a team effort?

- Managers, human resources (HR), and new employees all play integral roles in successful onboarding.
- Peer mentors and buddy systems help acclimate new employees and share onboarding responsibilities with the team.
- Others, such as job coaches and workplace accommodations professionals can contribute to a successful onboarding experience.

Why should onboarding processes 'bend and flex'?

- Flexible approaches to training and onboarding, which account for varied learning speeds and styles, are more effective than rigid ones.
- The pace and complexity of onboarding, and the tools used to support it can be adjusted based on regular communication and feedback with new employees.



Onboarding sets the stage for **success**, fostering **confidence**, **productivity**, and a sense of **belonging** among all new employees.



3 Tips for Inclusive Onboarding

1. Assess your current onboarding processes and materials

- Prioritize the development of detailed onboarding plans that extend beyond a brief orientation.
- Ensure these plans cover ongoing support, guidance, and development opportunities over several months.
- Involve your team in the improvement of onboarding processes and materials.
- Regularly review your onboarding materials and processes.

2. Create an onboarding roadmap for employees

- Tell employees exactly what to expect from their onboarding experience.
- Use clear, easy-to-understand language, and provide examples when necessary to avoid misunderstandings.
- Be sure to share your guide with new employees before they start to help them prepare and alleviate jitters.
- Include resources such as:
 - Checklists, visual aids, and/or other appropriate job aides
 - Glossary
 - Timetables/Schedules
 - Performance expectations
 - Feedback plan
 - Team profile
 - Remote work guidance

- Frequently Asked Questions section
- Workplace norms & culture and expectations
- Technology & tools list
- Peer Mentorship
- Resource Directory
- Regularly review and adapt onboarding guides to ensure ongoing effectiveness.

3. Identify a Peer Mentor

- Peer mentors can play an integral role in supporting success for neurodivergent employees.
- Peer mentors can:
 - Provide encouragement and guidance.
 - Help employees find answers and solutions.
 - Offer guidance about social expectations and the “unwritten” conventions of the workplace.
- Peer mentors should:
 - Work in the same or similar job as the new employee.
 - Be clear and flexible communicators.
 - Be knowledgeable and supportive.

Use the [Employee Success Profile](#) with new employees to learn about their communication preferences, work style, and potential accommodation needs. You can also complete one yourself!

Ideally, have employees fill it out before their first day to help you prepare for their onboarding.

Workplace Communication

Effective workplace communication is critical for all teams. By prioritizing clarity, adaptability, and empathy in communication practices, managers can bridge understanding gaps, promote collaboration, and empower all team members to contribute their unique perspectives effectively.



Example Scenario

Sarah is a new employee with a nonspecific learning disability who works at her local community center. Sarah excels in one-on-one discussions with colleagues and enjoys using instant messaging for routine communication. Challenges arise during team meetings. It takes Sarah slightly longer than her peers to process oral information and her anxiety about being called upon makes it difficult for her to respond effectively.

During a private meeting, Sarah and her manager discuss her communication strengths and the areas where adjustments may help. They decide to try three main strategies. First, the team is encouraged to use instant messaging with Sarah for routine communication and non-urgent queries to accommodate her proficiency and comfort. Second, Sarah's manager will send the team an informal meeting agenda, allowing Sarah (and the rest of the team) the necessary time to prepare notes. Third, the meeting format is adapted to accept written contributions from any member of the team beforehand if they choose.

The implementation of these strategies proves to be a welcome improvement for both Sarah and her team, improving communication and collaboration.

Insights

Why is clear communication important for all employees?

- Accessible, transparent, and respectful communication is the cornerstone of a collaborative and inclusive work environment.
- It accelerates learning and cultivates a team atmosphere where all employees can contribute meaningfully.
- It saves time and money.

What are some common barriers to accessible communication for neurodivergent employees in the workplace?

- **Misunderstanding:** Sometimes, neurodivergent people communicate in ways that might be different from what others expect. For example, autistic employees may not interpret and/or use nonverbal cues like facial expressions or body language in the same way as neurotypical employees. An autistic employee may also interpret language literally, which can lead to misunderstandings.
- **Sensory Overload:** Busy or noisy environments can overwhelm some neurodivergent individuals, making it hard for them to focus on conversations or process information.

- **Social Interaction:** Difficulty with social cues and norms can make it challenging for some neurodivergent individuals to navigate workplace interactions and build relationships with colleagues.
- **Written Communication:** Some neurodivergent individuals may have trouble organizing their thoughts in writing and/or understanding written instructions.

Do all neurodivergent employees have distinctive communication differences?

- Some neurodivergent employees may have distinctive abilities or unique preferences for communication tools or mediums (for example preferring written vs oral communication, or vice versa).
- Like neurotypical employees, neurodivergent employees differ greatly in their communication strengths and preferences.
- It's essential to avoid making assumptions about how an employee prefers to work and communicate. When in doubt, ask!



Prioritizing **clarity**, **adaptability**, and **empathy**, in communication practices is **critical** for an effective workplace.



3 Tips for More Effective Communication

1. Don't make assumptions about an employee's communication needs and abilities:

- Take the time to actively listen to the individual and observe their communication patterns without preconceived notions based on labels.
- Hold open conversations with each of your employees about their communication strengths and preferences.
- Consult with employees regularly to ensure that one-to-one/group meetings, documents, and other media are accessible and effective. Take these opportunities to interact with employees and ask questions.

2. Adapt your communication:

- Make practical adjustments based on your employee's unique abilities and preferences to ensure comfortable and effective two-way communication.
- Examples of adapting communication:
 - Breaking down complex information into digestible chunks.
 - Varying communication channels (such as email, one-on-one, online chat, etc.) to match strengths.
 - Tailoring feedback approaches to individuals.
 - Offering written feedback alongside verbal discussions.

- Increasing structure. For example, providing agendas or outlines for meetings in advance.
- Incorporating visual aids like charts or diagrams.
- Having regular check-ins with employees. Schedule one-on-one check-ins to address concerns privately.

3. Know that your words matter:

- Person-first language emphasizes the individual (e.g., "Marianne is a person with autism"). Identity-first language emphasizes identity (e.g., "Marianne is autistic").
- Use the language and labels preferred by the individual (e.g., person-first vs identity-first). If you don't know, ask.
- Strive to use language that promotes dignity, respect, and autonomy for neurodivergent individuals, for example:
 - Don't say, "She suffers from autism." Say: "She is a person with autism" or "She is autistic."
 - Instead of saying: "He's not social." Say: "He's more comfortable in quieter or less crowded environments."

Use the [Employee Communication Compass](#) to support productive and collaborative conversations with employees in order to help them communicate effectively and comfortably.

Neuro-Inclusive Management Practices

Flexible and supportive management practices are key for building neurodiverse teams. By embracing differences, fostering adaptability, and implementing inclusive policies and strategies, managers can create a workplace where every team member, including those who are neurodivergent, can thrive.



Example Scenario

Clarice is a new employee with Down Syndrome who works as a carryout associate at a local grocery store. Clarice is a dedicated employee who loves helping colleagues and customers.

Recently, her trainer, Matt, has noticed that Clarice can be overly rigid in her approach to bagging groceries and organizing carts for customers, sometimes ignoring customer preferences leading to their feeling inconvenienced. While her commitment to following procedures is commendable, Matt needs to provide constructive feedback that encourages a balance between adhering to her training guidelines and being flexible in customer interactions.

Matt ensures that he provides clear and direct feedback to Clarice right away, but instead of just rehashing what is wrong, he has an open conversation with Clarice. He ensures that he seeks her input so he can clarify expectations for her and he communicates in a clear and respectful manner. Together, they decide that it would help Clarice to supplement her personalized training manual with concrete examples of how to fulfil her duties, while being flexible with customers. Additionally, Matt checks in with Clarice more frequently to ensure that she is set up for success.

By approaching the situation with positivity, flexibility, and a collaborative mindset, Matt and Clarice create an environment that effectively supports Clarice's professional development.

Insights

Why are clear expectations critical for neurotypical and neurodivergent employees?

- Concrete expectations for roles, tasks, and outcomes ensures all employees know what to do, how to do it, how to prioritize their work, and how to get help if needed.
- Clear expectations tend to make employees feel more confident and happier at work.

Why are some managers hesitant to provide feedback to neurodivergent employees?


- Managers can be concerned about how neurodivergent employees will react to feedback, fearing it may cause stress or discomfort or be misunderstood, leading them to avoid giving it altogether.
- For neurotypical and neurodivergent employees, timely, two-way feedback is critical and respectful of employees as it allows them to clarify expectations.
- Feedback should be delivered in a balanced and positive manner, focusing on both areas of improvement and strengths to maintain motivation and confidence.
- It should also be focused, tailored, and action-oriented.

What does it mean to be solution-focused with employees?

- A solution-focus involves shifting the focus from dwelling on problems to identifying and implementing solutions to overcome challenges.
- Taking a supportive and solution-focused approach to performance management can:
 - Enhance productive, open communication
 - Reduce anxiety and stress
 - Promote problem-solving and follow-through
 - Increase trust and rapport
 - Motivate, rather than discourage, both neurodivergent and neurotypical employees

What makes managers 'adaptable'?

- Adaptable managers are open to new ideas and feedback, willing to adjust their strategies and approaches as needed.
- They seek opportunities for personal and professional growth, staying informed about best practices to improve their management skills with a diverse group of employees.
- They are supportive and collaborative, adapting their management style to accommodate different personalities and situations.



Approaching a situation with **positivity**, **flexibility**, and a **collaborative mindset**, creates an environment that effectively **supports professional development.**

5 Tips For Being an Effective Neuro-Inclusive Manager

1. Look for ways to enhance clarity in all communications and resources:

- Make sure that when you communicate, whether orally or in writing, you do so in a way that is easy for everyone to understand, encourages collaboration, and is open and transparent.
- Let your team know that questions are welcome if anything is unclear.
- If information or instructions are not clear, talk with the employee(s) to find out why.

2. Ensure expectations are always clearly defined:

- Provide concrete expectations so that employees know what to do. Don't assume that employees know exactly what to do, how to do it, and what their priorities are.
- Define outcomes, not just tasks and steps.
- Ask the employee to tell you what they understood from your explanation to make sure they got it right.
- Break down responsibilities and tasks into manageable components and use visual aids like lists, tables, and checklists to aid the understanding of expectations, as appropriate.

3. Provide regular, personalized feedback:

- Provide regular feedback, which is focused and action-oriented.
- Take steps to ensure team members feel comfortable seeking feedback.
- Tailor the level and type of feedback according to what works best for each employee.

4. Take a Solution-Focused Approach:

- Engage employees in brainstorming and decision-making, so they can contribute to finding solutions that support their success on the job; ask them:
 - What could be hindering performance?
 - What could help them?
- Acknowledge and use employees' strengths and past successes as a foundation for problem-solving.
- Offer support if an employee is facing a performance issue and strive to stay positive and optimistic.

5. Get to Know Your Employees:

- Adjust your approach to communication and support based on what is objectively working or not working.
- Use tools, like the ones in this toolkit, to get to know your employees:
 - Some team members thrive with detailed guidance and prefer step-by-step instructions to excel in their tasks.
 - Others prefer a hands-off approach, excelling with the freedom to independently explore solutions and showcase their problem-solving skills.
- Set up regular check-ins with your employees: Use these as an opportunity to get to know your employee and to monitor and adjust practices accordingly.

Use the [Inclusive Management Self-Assessment Tool](#) to reflect on your management practices and identify areas for growth.

Workplace Accommodations

Selecting and implementing appropriate workplace accommodations can be crucial for ensuring equal opportunities and accessibility for all employees, including those who are neurodivergent. By tailoring support to address individual needs and providing inclusive policies, managers can create an environment where everyone feels valued and empowered to contribute fully.



Example Scenario

Rhonda, a dedicated autistic bookkeeper at a local accounting firm, loves her job but the bustling office environment and harsh fluorescent lighting triggers her anxiety, affecting her concentration and well-being.

Mounting stress leads to an increase in sick days for Rhonda. Concerned about her wellbeing, Rhonda's manager, Ben, meets with Rhonda to discuss her recent absences and to understand if there's anything he can do to help. Rhonda opens up about her sensory difficulties in the office while Ben listens attentively. Together, they brainstorm potential solutions, deciding on practical adjustments like using noise-cancelling headphones and relocating Rhonda's desk to a quieter and dimmer space.

With the support of human resources, Ben and Rhonda put a plan into place right away. Rhonda immediately experiences positive changes, finding the workplace more conducive to her needs. Ben and Rhonda agree to revisit their plan frequently to ensure its ongoing effectiveness.

By approaching the situation with empathy, seeking a practical solution, and collaborating, Ben ensures everyone wins. Rhonda can now fully engage at work, and Ben feels confident her duties will be fulfilled effectively, comfortably, and on time.

Please note: The information presented in this section is intended for general understanding, not legal advice. For more information about topics such as the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and the duty to accommodate, consult these resources:

- Accessibility in Ontario
<https://www.ontario.ca/page/accessibility-in-ontario>
- Ontario Human Rights Commission
<https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-ableism-and-discrimination-based-disability/8-duty-accommodate>
- Canadian Human Rights Commission
<https://www.chrc-ccdp.gc.ca/en/about-human-rights/what-the-duty-accommodate>

Insights

What are workplace accommodations and why are they critical?

- Workplace accommodations involve making changes to the workplace or how work is usually done so that people with different needs and abilities can do their jobs effectively and comfortably.
- Accommodations may require medical documentation, disclosure of a disability, and/or coordination with Human Resources or other departments.
- Providing reasonable accommodations is a legal responsibility, covered by both federal and provincial human rights legislation.
- Appropriate workplace accommodations:
 - Enhance employee mental health, overall wellbeing, and productivity at work
 - Contribute to a culture where all employees feel valued, respected, and included

Do all workplace adjustments require a formal accommodations process?

- Proactive, low-cost informal adjustments can often be highly effective, potentially avoiding the need for formal accommodation processes.
- Examples of such adjustments include:
 - Flexible meeting formats and communication channels
 - Individualized on the job resources
 - Presenting information in alternative formats (e.g., written rather than oral)
 - Mentoring
 - Regular check-ins and increased informal supports
- They are a common part of healthy workplaces, demonstrating commitment to inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility.

How might accommodating non-apparent disabilities differ from accommodating apparent disabilities?

- Accommodating non-apparent disabilities (i.e., disabilities that are not readily visible by looking at someone), may require a deeper understanding of individual needs and preferences, as these disabilities are not immediately apparent and can vary significantly between individuals.
- Accommodations for non-apparent disabilities may involve adjustments to tasks, communication options, and on-the-job resources, rather than physical modifications.
- This means accommodations for individuals with non-apparent disabilities, including neurodivergent people, may be overlooked.
- Having access to appropriate adjustments and accommodations is just as important for individuals with non-apparent disabilities as it is for those with apparent disabilities.

What are some misconceptions about accommodations?

Myth	Reality
Accommodations provide unfair, preferential treatment	The duty to accommodate employees with disabilities is a legal responsibility, not preferential treatment. Accommodations support employees to perform their best in the workplace.
Accommodations are always costly	Accommodations range in cost. Proactive, no- or low-cost informal accommodations can be highly effective.
Accommodations are a way of getting out of work	Accommodations are designed to help people be their most productive - they are there to enable employees to do their job well!

4 Tips for Effective Workplace Accommodations

1. Know your workplace's accommodations process:

- Read your workplace's policies on accommodations.
- Be ready to provide clear and accessible information about the accommodations process, including who to contact, what documentation may be required, and the steps involved in requesting accommodations.
- If your organization does not have a workplace accommodations process, create one. See:
 - "Employers' Toolkit: Making Ontario Workplaces Accessible to People With Disabilities, 2nd Edition": <https://accessibilitycanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Employers-Toolkit-CBC-2nd-edition.pdf>

2. Make it easy for your team to talk about their needs:

- Let them know it's okay to discuss accommodations and workplace adjustments.
- Consider multiple channels for employees to communicate their needs, such as one-on-one meetings, anonymous suggestion boxes, or online forms.

3. Regularly review employee accommodations:

- If accommodations are implemented, establish a process for regular review and feedback to ensure their effectiveness and relevance over time.
- Be ready to make changes when needed.

4. Collaborate with the right resources:

- Seek support and guidance from human resources and other departments, keeping the employee in the loop, to ensure a successful accommodation experience.
- Consider partnering with external resources like Specialisterne to provide additional support and expertise in implementing workplace accommodations for neurodivergent employees.

Use the [Accommodations and Adjustments Brainstorm Sheet](#) to help you and your employees identify accommodations and adjustments that may be suitable to the job role and working environment.



Job Coaching

Job coaching can be a valuable resource to support employees in learning workplace culture, navigating performance expectations, understanding team dynamics, or other important aspects of the job. By providing personalized guidance and assistance, job coaching supports professional development and empowers individuals to become more effective in their roles.



Example Scenario

Clay, an autistic clerk at a local drugstore, is responsible for stocking shelves, managing inventory, and serving customers. He is incredibly knowledgeable and loves helping customers but struggles to interpret social cues. Occasionally this leads to misunderstandings which contributes to significant social anxiety for Clay.

The store owner has encouraged Clay to take on a managerial role at the drugstore, but several recent misunderstandings with customers have shaken his confidence. Clay asks about working with a coach to help him achieve work-focused goals related to understanding and navigating customer expectations and communication. The owner supports the plan.

Clay appreciates the private and collaborative coaching process, focused on specific skills and situations that matter to Clay. After two months of weekly meetings, Clay has discovered several practical insights and strategies aligned with his goals of being a clear, friendly, and helpful yet assertive clerk. He still experiences some miscommunication in the workplace, but he feels much less anxious and decides he is ready to move into the managerial role without continued coaching.

Insights

What is job coaching?

- All employees benefit from the support of others in the workplace, particularly in learning the workplace culture, navigating performance expectations, and learning how teams communicate and collaborate.
- Job coaches provide practical guidance and support through regular meetings and correspondence to:
 - Promote skill-building
 - Support problem-solving
 - Facilitate workplace communication and knowledge exchange to build mutual understanding
- Job coaching can be made available for employees as a workplace accommodation.
- Job coaching is not therapy or counselling.

What should you look for in a job coaching provider?

- Effective job coaching takes a practical approach, with clear and specific work-related objectives, driven by the individual being coached and input from their manager.
- Coaching should provide proactive and continuous support, including regular check-ins and correspondence, to support professional development and problem-solving.

- Good coaches take a personalized approach, focusing on the unique needs of each person, helping them to navigate challenges based on their situation and goals.
- The communication style and approach of a coach should align with the individual values of the employee.

What does job coaching offer to neurodivergent employees?

- Neurodivergent employees may learn, communicate, and process information differently than neurotypical employees; thus they can experience unique barriers in the workplace.

- For example, autistic and other neurodivergent employees may struggle to understand social norms and etiquette, causing social anxiety and confusion about expectations.
- Coaching can offer a supportive and focused approach for addressing these, or related challenges.
- It can also support neurodivergent employees and their managers in identifying appropriate accommodations and resources to support success in the workplace.



Job coaching **empowers** individuals to become more effective in their roles.

5 Tips for Providing Job Coaching

1. Have open discussions about job coaching with employees who may benefit:

- Pick a convenient time and location, and be sure to show support and understanding during the conversation.
- Work with the employee to identify areas where they may benefit from coaching or other adjustments.
- Instead of making assumptions, ask open-ended questions to understand your employee's perspective. For example, you might ask, "How do you feel about your current workload and responsibilities?" or "Are there any specific areas where you think you could benefit from additional support or skills development?"
- Share any observations you have made regarding their work or interactions. Be specific and focus on behaviours or situations that relate to the potential benefits of coaching.
- As always, be balanced in your feedback.
- Introduce the concept of coaching as a collaborative process aimed at helping individuals develop useful strategies and enhance their skills in specific areas.

2. Remember that coaching is voluntary:

- Some individuals may thrive with one-on-one coaching, while others may prefer working directly with supervisors and/or mentors.
- If challenges are straightforward and both employees and managers are confident in their ability to collaborate on solutions, coaching may not be necessary.
- Effective coaching requires buy-in from the employee and the manager. The decision should be a collaborative one, involving open communication between employee and manager, to determine the most effective and supportive approach.

3. Collaborate:

- Great job coaches facilitate collaboration between employees and managers, helping them both to take an active role in solving issues, identifying options, and taking ownership.
- The focus is on working together to find solutions, promoting ongoing growth, and self-reliance.
- Ensure there is a mutually agreed upon feedback loop between the employee, manager, and coach.

4. Combine Approaches:

- Don't forget that it's possible to use a combination of approaches.
- Internal resources such as mentorship, training, or support groups that align with the employee's needs and preferences can be implemented while engaging with a coach to provide additional support and guidance.

5. Consult a service provider with experience supporting neurodivergent employees:

- Working with a neurodiversity-specific service provider can enhance the overall coaching experience, fostering greater success.
- Specialisterne recognizes that neurodivergent employees may have unique learning and communication styles, facing potential barriers in the workplace. We offer action-oriented Workplace Supports, collaborating with both employees and employers to foster inclusive and productive work environments.
- For more information, contact: services.ca@specialisterne.com

Use the [Exploring Job Coaching - Employee Assessment](#) to help you and employees discuss work-related strengths, challenges, and coaching preferences, enabling a collaborative approach to professional development.

Tools



- Employee Success Profile
- Employee Communication Compass
- Inclusive Management Self-Assessment
- Accommodations and Adjustments Brainstorm Sheet
- Exploring Job Coaching - Employee Assessment



Tool: Employee Success Profile

Employee Name:

Date:

Skills, Strengths, and Growth

Skills for Success: Foundational and transferable skills needed to participate and thrive in learning, work, and life

- **Adaptability:** Being able to adjust and handle changes or challenges.
- **Collaboration:** Working together with others to achieve a common goal.
- **Communication:** Expressing thoughts and ideas clearly to others and understanding what they say.
- **Creativity and Innovation:** Thinking of new and imaginative ideas and finding inventive solutions.
- **Digital Skills:** Knowing how to use technology and navigate digital tools effectively.
- **Numeracy:** Understanding and working with numbers, being able to use math in daily life.
- **Problem Solving:** Finding solutions to challenges and making good decisions.
- **Reading:** Understanding and interpreting written information.
- **Writing:** Expressing thoughts and ideas through written words.
- **Other:** (Specify)



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[Learn about the Skills - Canada.ca](https://www.canada.ca/en/services/jobs/training/initiatives/skills-success/understanding-individuals.html)

(<https://www.canada.ca/en/services/jobs/training/initiatives/skills-success/understanding-individuals.html>)

Complete each of the following:

Choosing from the *Skills for Success*, what are some key skills you feel the most confident in?

Choosing from the *Skills for Success*, what skills do you want to focus on developing?

What are some tips for supporting your skill development?

Work Environment and Style**Complete the following:**

If applicable, describe work situations you find particularly stressful (e.g., conflict, time-management, meetings, changes, etc.):

If applicable, describe any go-to strategies for coping with stressful situations?:

On each row, select the statement which describes your preferences best:		
<input type="radio"/> I prefer a team-oriented environment	<input type="radio"/> Neutral/It Depends	<input type="radio"/> I prefer an individual-oriented environment
<input type="radio"/> I prefer a highly supportive environment	<input type="radio"/> Neutral/It Depends	<input type="radio"/> I prefer a highly autonomous environment
<input type="radio"/> I prefer a quiet work environment	<input type="radio"/> Neutral/It Depends	<input type="radio"/> I prefer an energetic work environment
<input type="radio"/> I prefer a flexible work environment	<input type="radio"/> Neutral/It Depends	<input type="radio"/> I prefer a structured work environment

What key characteristics are important to you in a teammate?

Are there any challenges or obstacles that you face when it comes to learning on the job?



Tool: Effective Communication Compass

Use this checklist to support productive and collaborative conversations with all employees to help them communicate effectively and comfortably.

1. Set up a Comfortable Space

- ☐ Find a quiet and comfortable space for your discussion.
- ☐ Ensure confidentiality.

2. Start with a Positive Opening

- ☐ Begin the conversation with a positive and welcoming tone.
- ☐ Emphasize the value of effective communication for collaboration and success.

3. Discuss the Role's Communication Expectations and Tools

- ☐ Discuss the key communication expectations (oral and written) for the role and any specific communication tools (email, phone calls, in-person discussions, messaging software such as Slack) crucial for job success.
- ☐ Discuss the role's meeting participation expectations (e.g., in-person, virtual, contributing in writing).
- ☐ Discuss how the role typically handles feedback—whether written, verbal, or a combination.
- ☐ Explain how the role generally communicates instructions and assignments.
- ☐ Ask about the employee's preferred modes of communication (e.g., written, verbal, visual).
- ☐ Clarify their comfort level with the role's communication expectations, tools, and feedback mechanisms.

4. Discuss possible Adjustments or Accommodations

- ☐ Discuss any challenges the employee might face in understanding or executing tasks related to communication.
- ☐ Ask about any specific supports or accommodations related to oral and written communication.
- ☐ Discuss strategies to align support mechanisms with both role requirements and employee preferences.

5. Plan for Regular Check-ins on Communication

- ☐ Establish an ongoing communication plan with regular check-ins.
- ☐ Focus on aligning communication strategies with both role requirements and employee preferences.
- ☐ Set the frequency and preferred format for follow-up discussions about communication and adjust accordingly.



Tool: Inclusive Management Self-Assessment

Consider the reflection prompts below each inclusive management tip and identify potential actions.

1. Communicate Clearly

Reflection Prompts:

- How often do I find myself using language that may not be clear to all team members?
- When conveying information, do I ensure that my message is straightforward and easily understood by everyone?
- How well do I adapt my communication style to team members with different communication styles?

What are 1-3 concrete actions I can take to ensure clear communication? (Consider any resources or supports you may need)

2. Set Concrete Expectations

Reflection Prompts:

- How consistently are expectations for tasks and projects clear to all team members?
- In what ways do I ensure that my team understands outcomes, steps, and rationales?
- How do I handle situations where expectations may not be met, and how do I communicate necessary adjustments?

What are 1-3 concrete actions I can take to set concrete expectations? (Consider any resources or supports you may need)

3. Provide Tailored Feedback

Reflection Prompts:

- How do I tailor my guidance for employees who thrive with detailed instructions versus those who prefer a more independent and hands-off approach?
- In what ways do I consider each team member's preferences and personality when delivering feedback?
- How do I encourage an open and constructive feedback loop between me and my team members?

What are 1-3 concrete actions I can take to ensure I provide adequate tailored feedback to everyone? (Consider any resources or supports you may need)

4. Take A Solution-Focused Approach

- When employees face performance challenges, how often do I focus on finding solutions rather than dwelling on problems?
- How do I involve my team in problem-solving discussions and decision-making processes?
- In what ways do I promote a positive and solution-oriented mindset within my team?

What are 1-3 concrete actions I can take to take a solution-focused approach with everyone? (Consider any resources or supports you may need)

5. Get to Know Your Employees

- Do I spend enough time with my employees to understand their needs, preferences, and strengths?
- Do team members feel like they can voice their opinions and concerns without fear of judgment or reprisal?
- Do I pay attention to what my employees have to say and take a genuine interest in their perspectives and ideas?

What are 1-3 concrete actions I can take to get to know all of my employees? (Consider any resources or supports you may need)



Tool: Accommodations & Adjustments Brainstorm Sheet

Issue Interfering with Job Performance	Cause or Contribution to the Issue	Potential Solutions	Next Steps
<i>Example:</i> I am not able to focus on my work because I am too distracted by the noise.	<i>Example:</i> Coworkers are chatting with other coworkers at their desks and make occasional phone calls	<i>Example:</i> Wearing noise cancelling headphones Moving my desk to a quieter area of the office	<i>Example:</i> Manager to talk with human resources about implementing potential solutions



Common Adjustments and Accommodations for Neurodivergent Employees

There are many different types of adjustments and accommodations that could be beneficial for neurodivergent employees. Below are some examples of adjustments and accommodations (this list is not exhaustive):



Sensory

- **Auditory:**
 - Noise-cancelling headphones
 - White noise machine
 - Priority seating away from high-traffic areas/in a separate room
 - Provide quiet area for breaks
 - Remote work
- **Temperature and Tactile:**
 - Adaptation of work uniform/dress code
 - Allow hot/cold beverages at work stations
 - Allow space heaters/blankets/fans/sweaters/etc.
 - Remote work
- **Light:**
 - Allow curtains/blinds on windows
 - Offer lamps/overhead lighting with incandescent bulbs instead of fluorescent bulbs
 - Allow sunglasses and/or hat
 - Provide electronic devices that have a blue light mode/other dimming features
 - Remote work
- **Scent:**
 - Implement and enforce scent-free workplace policies
 - Remote work



Communication

- Offer multiple forms of training and information/instruction sharing (i.e., verbal, written, etc.)
- Offer 1:1 meetings/training for individuals that find group meetings overwhelming
- Provide a job coach and/or a mentor
- Provide written summaries of meetings
- Allow webcams to be off during virtual meetings
- Have chat boxes turned on during virtual meetings to allow for written communication

Additional Notes

Add any additional notes about accommodations and adjustments below. This could include points that don't fit into the chart above, more information about implementing the accommodation(s), and/or information about past experiences that help inform the accommodation process.

Employee Notes:

Manager Notes:



Tool: Exploring Job Coaching – Employee Assessment

Employee Name: [Employee Name]

Position/Job Title: [Job Title]

Date: [Date]

1. Background:

- **Current Responsibilities:** Briefly describe your main tasks and responsibilities in your current role.
- **Strengths:** Which specific tasks/skills do you excel at?
- **Challenges:** Which specific tasks/skills would you like support or guidance with?
- **Professional Development Goals:** What do you want to achieve and learn in your role?

2. About Job Coaching

- Job coaching is designed to:
 - Promote skill-building
 - Support problem-solving
 - Support and effective workplace communication
- A job coach collaborates with employees and managers to:
 - Identify areas for growth
 - Offers guidance on overcoming challenges
 - Support employees in finding strategies to achieve their goals.
- Have you participated in coaching before? If yes, briefly describe your experience.
- How do you think coaching might benefit you in your professional development?

3. Next Steps

- How interested are you in exploring coaching?
 - Highly interested
 - Moderately interested
 - Not interested
- Do you have any questions or concerns about coaching?
- If interested, when would be a good time for coaching sessions?

About Canadian Institute For Safety, Wellness & Performance (CISWP)

Building capacity for productive and sustainable work

The Canadian Institute for Safety, Wellness & Performance (CISWP) is committed to building productive and sustainable workplaces through a collaborative and transdisciplinary approach. CISWP's goal is to position Canada as a global leader in empowering businesses to adapt and thrive in a competitive economy and aims to improve the safety, wellness, and performance of the Canadian workforce through knowledge generation, research transfer, and workforce development. Working closely with stakeholders, the institute strives to conduct cutting-edge research and develop evidence-informed products, tools, and services to advance their capacity and address knowledge gaps.

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About Specialisterne

Employ Different Thinking: Access talent that is often overlooked, diversify your teams, and build workplace inclusion. Specialisterne works with businesses, like yours, to raise awareness and understanding about neurodiversity, build inclusive hiring and management practices, and connect you to a highly qualified, untapped talent pool.

Founded in Denmark in 2004, Specialisterne works with businesses around the world to leverage the talents of autistic or neurodivergent job seekers. We've seen first hand how creating a neuro-inclusive work environment is good for business. A different perspective, alternative communication style, or a passion for detail are great assets to any employer. However, standard recruitment processes and management practices can often get in the way of tapping into and retaining this qualified talent pool. This means that excellent candidates, potentially the best ones, often don't even get an interview.

At Specialisterne, we work with businesses to build their organizational capacity and confidence to adopt and implement neuro-inclusive recruitment and management practices. These practices not only support neurodivergent candidates and employees, but contribute to an accessible and inclusive workplace that benefits all employees. With services that range from education and recruitment to consulting and workplace support, Specialisterne has customizable engagement models that will help you achieve your goals.

Contact Specialisterne at contact.ca@specialisterne.com or visit our website at ca.specialisterne.com.



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