

Building an Inclusive Workplace: Health Conditions and Disabilities Guide



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Introduction

This toolkit has been designed to support you in creating a culture of understanding and inclusivity across your organisation.

Within the toolkit, several different types of disabilities/difficulties have been highlighted. Each area provides information on the disability/difficulty and what you as an employer can do to help provide support within the workplace.

An estimated 16.1 million people in the UK had a disability in 2022/23, this represents 24% of the total population. According to the ONS Labour Force Survey, an estimated 5.5 million disabled people were in employment between April to June 2024. Therefore, it is imperative that employers have the information and support available to allow them to support disabled individuals in the workplace.

People with additional needs are likely to learn and work at different rates and require different levels and types of support. Seeking to understand the differences, including the different levels of prior knowledge and potential barriers, and to develop inclusive, alternative approaches to support those with a disability/difficulty or inclusion needs, is an essential part of successful integration into the workplace.

INclusive Worcestershire is a programme designed to help businesses embrace the diversity and inclusion agenda, to better support their staff and to grow their workforce.

INclusive Worcestershire pledges to improve and promote inclusivity in Worcestershire's workforce and increase awareness of how businesses can be more inclusive. If you have any questions or would like to find out more about INclusive Worcestershire, please email:

inclusiveemployment@worcestershire.gov.uk



Inclusive Approaches

Creating an Inclusive working environment

Creating an inclusive working environment requires deliberate effort and commitment from all members of the organisation.

Firstly, leadership must set the tone by actively promoting diversity and inclusion initiatives and ensuring they are embedded in company policies and practices. This involves establishing clear goals, fostering open communication channels, and providing resources for diversity training and education.

Additionally, it's crucial to actively recruit and retain employees from diverse backgrounds, ensuring that the workforce reflects the broader community.

You can create an inclusive working environment by:

- Introducing flexible working arrangements and schedules to cater to diverse needs
- Encouraging collaboration and teamwork across different departments and levels of the organisation, helping to break down barriers and promote understanding
- Delivering training and awareness programmes for all staff members to understand and support colleagues with additional needs
- Fostering a sense of belonging and ownership by providing opportunities for all employees to contribute ideas and participate in decision-making processes
- Establishing transparent communication channels for learners to voice their needs and concerns without the fear of discrimination
- Collaborating with external support services or experts to offer specialised assistance when necessary
- Embracing diversity and cultivating a culture of respect and acceptance across the organisation

Employers must do all they reasonably can to support disabled employees and workers in the workplace.

Employers must make reasonable adjustments to make sure workers with disabilities, or physical or mental health conditions, are not substantially disadvantaged when doing their jobs.

It is crucial that employers and employees have open conversations about what their individual needs are and what support they will require in the workplace. To aid conversations, the employee can also complete a [Health Adjustment Passport](#) which will entail the support and adjustments that need to be made.

There is additional support available for employees through the Access to Work grant scheme. Access to Work is a publicly funded employment support grant scheme that aims to support disabled people to start or stay in work. It can provide practical and financial support for people who have a disability, or physical or mental health condition. Support can be provided where someone needs support or adaptations, that are beyond reasonable adjustments.

Your employee can get support with the extra costs of working they may have because of their disability or health condition, for example:

- Aid and equipment in the workplace
- Adapting equipment to make it easier for them to use
- Money towards any extra travel costs to and from work if they can't use available public transport
- Money towards any extra travel costs for travel costs within work
- A wide variety of support workers
- The Access to Work Mental Health Support Service
- Other practical help at work, like a job coach or sign language interpreter

Access to Work does not provide the support itself but provides a grant to reimburse the agreed cost of the support that is needed.

It will not pay for reasonable adjustments. These are the changes you as an employer must legally make to support a person to do their job.

Access to Work will advise the employer if changes should be made as reasonable adjustments.

Want to find out more?

Further information on Access to Work can be found online.

Simply visit the [Access to Work](#) page on the GOV website or visit the [Access to Work factsheet for employers](#).

Anxiety and Mental Health

What is Anxiety and Mental Health?

Mental health encompasses a whole range of unseen difficulties from mild anxiety, known to us all, to more serious and enduring conditions, managed by medication and therapy.

Some are temporary, triggered by the external circumstances including Stress, Anxiety and Depression. Others are genetic such as Psychosis (which leads to a temporary altered perception of reality). Further include Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), Paranoia, Phobias, Eating Disorders and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

How it might affect someone

As an employer, you are not responsible for diagnosing mental health problems or expected to be a mental health expert, but you might notice behaviours or signs that someone is struggling.

These might include:

- Tearful or frequently upset
- Avoiding friends or social events
- Not enjoying activities they previously enjoyed
- Unable to carry out normal tasks or handle daily stresses
- Changing their eating habits
- Abusing alcohol or drugs
- Angry for prolonged periods of time
- Having paranoid thoughts
- Self-harming
- Talking about suicide

Mental health refers to the way we think, feel and act. Everybody has mental health, the same way everybody has physical health and we need to look after it. If you are concerned about a person's wellbeing, try to stay calm and have a conversation with them.

How you can help them

- Facilitate trust in your working relationship
- Be patient and demonstrate empathy - lack of understanding can lead to prejudice, resulting in isolation and suppressing the problem
- Do not put them under the spotlight
- Be alert to individual strengths and capitalise on them to build confidence
- Be consistent and resilient
- Constantly reinforce a positive vision of their future
- Be aware of professional boundaries
- Be aware of potential destructive behaviours - the result of low self-esteem can lead to sabotage of opportunities for success
- Someone with severe anxiety will often feel very negative about themselves – remind them of their good points and give targeted skill-specific praise
- Provide support to prioritise and organise their workload to avoid them feeling overwhelmed
- Encourage them to practice self-management strategies, for example, grounding and relaxation techniques, mantras and positive thinking approaches
- If appropriate, provide a quiet area or space within your workplace area for time-limited withdrawal and respite
- Try to encourage them to develop a problem-solving approach to their anxiety and maintain a supportive dialogue
- Someone with severe anxiety may rely on routines to predict what is required of them so try to give notice of any significant changes or events so that they can feel prepared
- Try to negotiate and be flexible around deadlines as they may spend an inordinate amount of time checking and rechecking their work
- Someone with social anxiety may be reluctant to contribute to group discussions or presentations – try to accommodate this whilst developing their resilience and confidence

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

What is Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder?

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is characterised by three core behaviours: inattentiveness, impulsiveness and over-activity, which are at a level inappropriate for the person's expected development.

It is the medical term used when it effects the person's development, behaviour and performance, family relationships or social interaction. ADHD is not a learning disability; most people with this condition are extremely intelligent, however it can affect other areas which can have an impact on the way they work.

Medication does not cure ADHD; it is like wearing glasses, it alleviates the symptoms. Medication can also have unwanted side-effects.

A multi-faceted approach, including various talking therapies, is the most effective way to manage the condition.

How it might affect someone

A person with ADHD may have difficulties with the following areas:

- Executive Functioning Tasks - organisation, planning, maintaining attention, focusing, concentration, making good decisions, impulse control, learning and remembering what has been learned
- Inhibitory Mechanisms - preventing hyperactivity, saying things 'out of turn', self-regulating emotional responses
- Limbic System - responsible for emotional changes, energy levels, sleep routines, memory and coping with stress

This can impact on their personal and social life too, leading to poor self-esteem, high levels of frustration and inappropriate social skills. Negative patterns of behaviour can build up, leading to some people also developing mood and conduct disorders.

How you can help them

Small adjustments in your approach can have a significant effect on someone with ADHD.

- Try to keep clear and consistently applied rules within the team
- Give them frequent and immediate feedback so they can more easily link this with the act
- If they cannot concentrate for the length of the meetings allow them a break so that they have an agreed exit process and return time
- Allow some restlessness at work - sensory distractions like tactile manipulations (stress ball) and physical breaks to move around can help maintain focus
- Allow them to turn off their camera and microphone during online meetings for short periods of time if they feel overwhelmed, overstimulated or are struggling with their concentration levels
- Give clear step-by-step instructions with visual organisational aids, breaking down tasks into manageable pieces
- Encourage them to write down important information in a designated place, either electronically or handwritten, whichever works best for the individual
- Encourage them to use visual strategies, for example: planners, organisers, timers and “to do” lists, visual calendars or wall planners and assistive technology such as smart phone planning applications
- Break longer tasks up into smaller steps and give frequent reminders about the expected working outcomes (chunking)
- Allow frequent breaks
- They may benefit from being away from windows, doors and other sources of distraction, but this will be down to personal preference

Autism Spectrum Disorder

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?

A person with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) will likely experience difficulties in all the identified areas: communication, social understanding, interests and information processing, and sensory processing. However, this will be on a spectrum, so each area will be affected by individuals in different ways.

Also, many people will have strategies in place to support themselves or be experienced in masking the challenges they face whilst at work and only reveal these at home, or when it is unavoidable. All areas of difficulty will likely be exacerbated when they feel anxious, stressed and/or in unfamiliar environments.

How it might affect someone

Autism is a complex neurodevelopmental disorder; it is a lifelong developmental condition that can affect the following:

- **Communication:** Differences in understanding and expressing communication and language. A person with Autism may be nonverbal or highly articulate, their use of language may mask their level of understanding.
- **Social understanding:** Differences in understanding social behaviour and the feelings of others and self-management of emotions.
- **Interests and information processing:** Differences in understanding concepts, generalising and managing transitions and passions for specific areas of interest, and the ability to absorb auditory information.
- **Sensory processing:** Differences in how they experience sensory information, heightened and lowered, including: touch, sight, hearing, smell, taste, vestibular (balance) and proprioceptive (body awareness).

How you can help them

The most helpful way to support someone with Autistic Spectrum Disorder is going to be talking to them and finding out about their individual needs. By identifying what they find challenging and what their strengths are, all employers can adjust their approach.

- Work with them to find the most effective way to communicate with them, some may prefer a written dialogue that gives them time for processing information and less social elements to navigate
- Give clear and precise information in manageable chunks
- They may have difficulty in initiating conversations, asking for help or problem solving so keep an eye out and check understanding
- If someone has challenges with frustrations or anxieties, agree a time out process
- Give them time to adjust to transitions (e.g. team to team, task to task)
- Give clear guidance on appropriate times to discuss 'special interests' if these are dominating or distracting from work
- Make allowances, where possible, for routines and rituals that work to ease their anxieties
- Be understanding that socially 'inappropriate' actions are unlikely to be deliberate - eye contact, body language, proximity, voice volume and intonation can be difficult to use and understand
- Try and avoid figures of speech or sarcasm
- Allow additional time for them to process verbal instructions/questions
- Support understanding by highlighting relevant and key points using visual systems such as sticky notes, colour coding, highlighting and mind maps
- Ensure the nature and demands of a task are clearly understood, for example, with tasks give approximate timings, share what needs to be covered and convey the necessary equipment/tools needed
- Use checklists to support the completion of longer tasks
- Use routines to support independence and provide emotional 'anchor points,' (e.g. predictable start and end routines)

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

What is Chronic Fatigue Syndrome?

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS) is a debilitating disorder characterized by extreme fatigue or tiredness that doesn't go away with rest and can't be explained by an underlying medical condition.

CFS can also be referred to as Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME) or Systemic Exertion Intolerance Disease (SEID).

How it might affect someone

A person with CFS may experience the following symptoms:

- Fatigue after physical or mental activities - this can last for more than 24 hours after the activity and is severe enough to interfere with daily activities
- Loss of memory or concentration
- Chronic insomnia (and other sleep disorders, therefore feeling unrefreshed after a night's sleep)
- Muscle pain
- Frequent headaches
- Joint pain
- Frequent sore throat
- Tender and swollen lymph nodes in neck and armpits

People are sometimes affected by CFS in cycles, with periods of feeling worse and then better again.

To manage their condition a person with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome will need to manage their exertion (physical and mental) throughout the day and week to ensure they rest accordingly and respond to how they are feeling.

How you can help them

- Be aware of the person's syndrome and make allowances, where possible, for attendance and on deadlines and completion of work
- Plan for rest periods during the day or plan the day to fit with the person's support needs: a person with CFS may find mornings or long days more challenging
- Be open to the idea of combining the workplace with remote working
- Offer flexible working hours so they can work when they are feeling well
- Show good planning of the day with agreed breaks
- Allow resting time between tasks or meetings
- Encourage them to keep a fatigue diary and update their manager regularly
- Allow the use of energy saving devices
- Offer and encourage the use of organisers and other tools for time management and organisation
- Allow for extensions on deadlines, where appropriate
- Utilise digital communication for meetings: this will allow the person to access meetings at a later date or in their home environment

Diabetes

What is Diabetes?

Diabetes is a common health condition, where a person's pancreas does not produce any insulin, or not enough, or where the insulin that is produced does not work properly. This causes your blood sugar level to be too high or too low and the body cannot use it properly.

There are two types of diabetes:

- **Type 1 diabetes:** Type 1 diabetes occurs when the body is unable to produce any insulin. Usually, it occurs before the age of 40, and especially in childhood. A common way of treating Type 1 diabetes is through daily insulin injections.
- **Type 2 diabetes:** Type 2 diabetes develops when the body can still make some insulin, but it is either not enough or does not work properly. It is usually controlled with a healthy diet and exercise and, in some cases, insulin. Type 2 diabetes is far more common than Type 1. In the UK, around 90% of all adults with diabetes have Type 2.

During pregnancy, some women have such high levels of blood glucose that their body is unable to produce enough insulin to absorb it all. This is known as gestational diabetes.

People with diabetes will be advised to eat healthy, exercise regularly and carry out regularly blood tests to check blood glucose. Uncontrolled diabetes can lead to damage to the heart, eyes, feet and kidney.

How it might affect someone

A person with Diabetes may experience:

- Excessive thirst
- Needing the toilet frequently
- Tiredness
- Wounds that don't heal very quickly
- Weight loss

To manage their condition a person with Diabetes will need to:

- Have regular meals
- Exercise
- Treat Hypoglycaemia quickly by providing a sugary drink as food can take too long to absorb

Diabetes cannot be cured but you can control the symptoms in order to prevent health problems developing later on in life. Glucose or blood sugar levels need to be regularly checked in diabetes.

If glucose levels get too low or too high, a person could experience hypoglycaemia or hyperglycaemia:

- **Hypoglycaemia (hypos)** is when their blood glucose level is too low and they experience sweating, anxiety/irritability, hunger, difficulty concentrating, blurred sight, and feeling shaky.
- **Hyperglycaemia (hyper)** is when their blood sugar is too high and they experience feeling very thirsty, needing the toilet more, tiredness, weight loss, blurred vision and fruity-smelling breath. This can be triggered by stress, illness, and being less active or diet. This can be life threatening and develop quickly over a few hours.

If the signs are spotted quickly enough, the hypo can be treated by taking something high in sugar, such as a non-diet fizzy drink. If the person is unable to swallow, seek medical help quickly rather than trying to force them.

How you can help them

- Be aware of the person's condition and their normal behaviour: if you notice their behaviour change, this may be due to their blood sugar levels
- Allow them to store food and drinks nearby in case of an emergency
- Make other staff aware of the location of emergency food and drinks in case they need to help the person
- Make sure they have regular breaks to allow them to monitor their blood sugar levels and treat if needed
- Support with time off to attend medical appointments or Diabetes clinics

Dyscalculia

What is Dyscalculia?

Dyscalculia is often associated with dyslexia and other learning difficulties. It is identified as a specific difficulty with learning and retaining basic math skills and manipulating numbers or completing mathematical tasks.

A person with Dyscalculia may have a range of underlying difficulties such as:

- Spatial orientation
- Sequencing and other organisational skills
- Fine motor control and co-ordination

How it might affect someone

Typical symptoms of dyscalculia can be:

- Difficulties with learning and retaining basic maths methods
- A reliance on counting and defaulting to addition when presented with a sum or calculation
- Difficulties with navigation and orientation
- Difficulties with money and budgeting
- Difficulties with estimating, counting backwards and sequencing numbers
- Difficulties with telling the time and time management
- High levels of anxiety associated with maths and numbers

How you can help them

- Providing assistive technology tools for calculations and numerical tasks
- Offering additional time or breaks for tasks involving numbers and calculations
- Simplifying complex numerical instructions and breaking them down into smaller steps
- Providing written instructions and visual aids to supplement verbal explanations
- Offering alternative methods for problem-solving, such as using diagrams
- Providing access to calculators or other tools to aid with arithmetic tasks
- Offering support from colleagues or mentors for complex numerical tasks
- Creating an inclusive environment where employees feel comfortable disclosing dyscalculia and requesting necessary accommodations
- Using visual and verbal cues/physical props
- Breaking down tasks into simple steps

Dyslexia

What is Dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a learning difficulty that mostly affects the skills involved in accurate and confident word reading and spelling. Dyslexia can also occur alongside other learning difficulties. It's estimated that up to 1 in every 10 to 20 people in the UK has some degree of Dyslexia.

People with Dyslexia are usually of average or above average intelligence, but tend to have specific learning difficulties with reading, spelling and writing. Maths and musical notation may also be affected.

A person with Dyslexia may have a range of underlying difficulties, not immediately associated with reading and writing, including perceptual problems.

How it might affect someone

Features of dyslexia can be:

- Difficulties with blending sounds to read, say and spell words
- Reading things wrong and then not fully understanding
- Difficulties with remembering more than one thing at a time
- Difficulties constructing written sentences
- Difficulties finding words when talking to someone
- Difficulties with organisation and time management
- Slower speed of information processing (needing longer to think what to say, having difficulty with 'word retrieval')
- Slower reading speed, especially if sensitive to light
- Time management and organisation, including completing activities
- Frustration at own difficulties which do not reflect their ability
- Difficulties with concentration

How you can help them

- Give additional time to read things properly and check that they have understood
- Offer reading support if needed, including technology if they prefer this support
- Provide dyslexia-friendly fonts and formatting in written materials, such as documents, emails, and presentations
- Offer dyslexia-friendly software tools that assist with spelling, grammar, and reading comprehension
- Allow extra time for tasks that involve reading or writing, such as completing reports or filling out forms
- Provide audio recordings or voice-to-text technology options for individuals who struggle with reading
- Encourage the use of mind mapping or visual aids to help with organising thoughts and ideas
- Create a supportive environment where employees feel comfortable disclosing their dyslexia and requesting necessary accommodations
- Establish clear communication channels for employees to seek assistance or clarification when needed
- Offer mentoring or buddy support systems to provide additional guidance and encouragement
- Present new information in small chunks and allow plenty of time for recall
- Ensure that targets are limited in number but challenging
- Encourage the use of spellcheckers
- Allow extra time for processing information by slowing down presentations and allow response time
- Allow extra time to answer questions and complete work
- Use calendars and checklists to structure tasks and meet deadlines
- Avoid putting the individual 'on the spot' to read, speak or present to others, without any preparation time
- Provide written notes for key information
- Allow the use of other formats to present information, for example, ICT or verbal accounts

Dyspraxia

What is Dyspraxia?

Dyspraxia is a development co-ordination disorder (DCD) which affects movement and coordination. It affects the way the brain processes information and the way messages in the brain are transmitted.

How it might affect someone

The features of DCD can be:

- Difficulties with gross and fine motor skills
- Appearing clumsy or difficulties with coordination
- Motor skills may be difficult to learn and retain
- Impaired or delayed speech
- Difficulty in planning and organising thoughts and ideas
- Appearing disorientated in the physical environment
- Difficulties with memory function (e.g. remembering where they left their keys, recalling or retaining information)
- Difficulties with attention and concentration

Reading and Writing: Inaccuracy when copying words and/or numbers, listening to or reading instructions, understanding or making sense of information, decoding maps and charts, spelling and cohesion when writing assignments.

Multitasking: Listening and taking notes at the same time.

Emotional and Sensory: Some people may have phobias, obsessive or immature behaviour, be sensitive to external stimulation (e.g. different levels of light, sound and heat intensity and/or experience extremes of emotions).

How you can help them

- Get to know the support needs of the individual
- Allow extra time to process information and complete tasks
- Consider that they may need adaptations to equipment or their working environment (e.g. pen grips, use of technology or different seating arrangements)
- Support with basic organisational skills, diary and folder management
- Allow access to word processors/laptops/voice recorders
- Make allowances for set tasks and deadlines
- Support organisational skills by using task planners or checklists
- Offering alternative methods for demonstrating knowledge or skills, such as verbal presentations or practical demonstrations
- Use structure, routines and consistency and reinforce with visual cues
- Allow additional time to complete tasks and build in assistance for written tasks, for example, use of ICT or technological aids
- Use simple, short instructions which are repeated and reinforced by visual prompts

Epilepsy

What is Epilepsy?

Epilepsy is a neurological condition that affects about 1 person in every 200 and causes recurrent seizures that originate in the brain.

People can experience many different types of epileptic seizures, and you will need to find out what is normal for each individual.

Seizures can last for different amounts of time. Once a seizure is over, the individual will need to recover, and this can take much longer than the seizure itself. The majority of people with epilepsy respond well to treatment and can get on with their lives. However, some people with frequent seizures, of any type, may need constant supervision and support.

How it might affect someone

There are three main types of seizures, which are:

- Primary generalised seizures
- Partial (focal) seizures
- Secondarily generalised seizures

Primary generalised seizures – the whole brain is affected by the disruption to its usual activity and consciousness is lost.

Seizures in the category include:

- **Absences**: The person looks blank for a few seconds and may not respond when spoken to or realise they have had a seizure. This type of seizure can happen repeatedly and can be mistaken for daydreaming.
- **Tonic-clonic**: The person stiffens, loses consciousness, convulses and may fall. Irregular breathing and/or incontinence may happen. Tonic and atonic seizures or drop attacks – the person may stiffen, fall heavily, lose muscle tone and crumple to the ground.
- **Myoclonic**: rhythmic, shock-like muscle jerks that can affect the whole body and can be strong enough to throw the person to the ground.

Partial (focal) seizures – only part of the brain is affected, and consciousness may be altered but not lost.

Seizures in this category include:

- **Simple partial seizure**: the person may experience unusual sensations and/or movement in one part of the body (e.g. tingling or twitching).
- **Complex partial seizures**: awareness is disturbed or lost and the person may experience unusual feelings. They may be unaware of their surroundings and unable to respond when spoken to and their behaviour may appear strange.

Secondarily generalised seizures – the disruption starts in one part of the brain and spreads to the whole brain.

Status epilepticus is a condition in which seizures persist for 30 minutes or more. It can occur with all types of seizure but with tonic-clonic seizures it is a medical emergency requiring immediate medical treatment.

If a tonic-clonic seizure lasts more than 5 minutes, or if a second seizure occurs before the person has recovered, call for medical help.

How you can help them

- Get to know their needs and how their epilepsy does or doesn't affect them and how they'd like to manage it
- Know a person's triggers and ensure they are supported to avoid them as much as possible at the workplace (e.g. missed meals, response to stress or anxiety, illness and flashing lights)
- If a person has a seizure at work, work with them to ensure they feel comfortable returning to the workplace
- Provide rest breaks and regular breaks to take medication
- Allocate an area to rest after a seizure
- Train staff in basic first aid or what they need to do in an emergency to support an individual having an epilepsy episode

Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD)

What are Moderate Learning Difficulties?

Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD) can also be known as GLD – a global learning delay or difference. This is not a specific but a generic learning difficulty which relates to a general delay in learning, it can affect everyone in a number of different ways.

A moderate learning difficulty is not a medical diagnosis but a range of assessments that can be carried out to determine whether a learning difficulty is present, such as literacy/numeracy diagnostics or tests, psychometric testing, IQ tests, and educational psychology assessments.

It can be difficult to recognise someone with MLD, as its presentation can be confused with 'bad' behaviour, autism, or Specific Learning Differences.

How it might affect someone

- Poor understanding of words and pictures and word association
- Low confidence/self-esteem
- Lacking appropriate or immature social skills, or completely the opposite
- May find it easier to 'show' rather than 'tell'
- May struggle with cognitive processes, such as memory, keeping attention, decision making and understanding language
- May not understand levels of seriousness, consequences or not responding well to instructions
- Individuals may have heightened phobias or anxieties
- May appear immature for age
- May struggle with organisation
- May have slow speech or poor vocabulary

How you can help them

- Speak to the person and listen to their needs as they probably have their own strategies and are aware of what their strengths and weaknesses are
- Encourage independence at all opportunities and avoid over dependence on support
- Provide clear concise instructions when assigning tasks
- Break tasks down into manageable sections, 1 or 2 instructions at a time
- Give full explanations using simple language
- Praise effort and reassure
- Allow extra time for tasks; assessments too, if necessary
- Provide cues, for example, keyword lists, dictionaries and reference posters to support with tasks
- Allow extra time to complete a task and work out responses
- Monitor and record progress, so that each small achievement is recognised
- Model ways of approaching a solution, giving initial steps and gradually adding prompts only if necessary

Physical Disability

What is a Physical Disability?

The term Physical Disability indicates a limitation of a person's physical functioning, mobility, dexterity or stamina.

This can include:

- Permanent disabilities
- Temporary illnesses
- A range of medical conditions

All of which will impact individuals differently and potentially fluctuate in different environments.

Some disabilities have a name such as Cerebral Palsy or Muscular Dystrophy. This is a generic term and everyone's experience of this will be vastly different. It's important to work with each employee appropriately to address their specific needs.

How it might affect someone

As each individual will have differing needs, the most important thing is to communicate with them and find out what support is needed.

A physical disability could affect a person's ability to:

- Process information
- Communicate, as they may also have some speech and language difficulties
- Take notes or undertake practical tasks, as they may have limitations in their strength and/or dexterity
- Meet their own personal daily independent needs
- Travel short or long distances, they may use manual or power wheelchairs, crutches, walking frames or may just need extra time and to use the lifts when moving around the workplace

How you can help them

- Be aware of any access arrangements required and make any reasonable adjustments required
- Always address the employee and not the person with them if they are accompanied by a support worker
- Complete an individual evacuation plan so they can safely evacuate the building in an emergency
- Try not to make any assumptions before you have discussed an individual's condition
- If you are planning a visit outside of the normal workplace, forward plan with your employee to ensure they have the same opportunities and access as the rest of the staff and take advice on risk assessments if necessary
- Allow for more time to answer questions or contribute in conversations
- Individuals may become more tired in the afternoon, due to their condition, and need to be aware of how to 'pace' their days within the workplace
- Please always ask and be discreet when talking to a person about their condition
- Ensure physical access to the workplace is maintained at all times, so the individual can move around the workplace easily and safely
- Be aware of specialist equipment such as adaptive keyboards and riser desks that may be useful
- Adjustable desks with adequate leg space may need to be considered
- If writing is difficult, consider using a digital voice recorder and transcript to record work
- Allow extra time to complete tasks
- If working in a physical environment, note that slower-paced activities are better than those requiring a fast response
- Ensure the person feels included and is encouraged and praised like other employees
- Be aware that the individual may suffer from fatigue, pain and discomfort

Sensory Impairment - Hearing Loss

What is Hearing Loss?

Hearing loss can be temporary or permanent, present since birth or onset at a later age.

Those who have a hearing impairment could range from British Sign Language users, from profoundly deaf who do not use hearing aids, to those that have hearing aids or a cochlear implant.

It is vital to understand individual needs as different people will be affected in different ways.

How it might affect someone

People who are Deaf/Hearing impaired will likely have difficulty:

- Participating in department discussions
- Acquiring subject specific vocabulary
- Understanding metaphors and jokes
- With written English
- Lip-reading
- Socialising with others in large groups
- Working in a room with background noise (for example the 'hum' of a computer and machinery)
- Working in a poorly lit room
- Accessing information/instructions correctly
- Taking notes whilst also listening to/watching other information

How you can help them

- Consider a range of ways of explaining activities or giving instructions so that misunderstanding is avoided
- Ensure the individual can see the person speaking, as they may find it helpful to read lips or body language
- Some people may become inattentive when others are speaking, owing to a difficulty in following speech within a group
- Avoid creating a noisy work environment (e.g. when a lot of people are talking at the same time, or when playing music or background noise)
- Use visual clues
- If engaging in a group discussion, make sure it is clear who is talking and when the conversation has changed from one speaker to another
- Some people may need to use other aids such as “signing” to help their communication, for instance, Makaton or British Sign Language - you will need to check with the person concerned, as they may well have developed their own range of signs
- Depending on the type of hearing loss, speech may be difficult for you to understand but this will become easier as you get to know the person concerned
- Particular attention needs to be paid to safety wherever you are - warnings that rely on hearing, such as fire alarms, shouted instructions, or car horns, may be ineffective
- Do remember that lip-reading and/or watching the interpreter is very tiring
- Be aware that hearing aids do not restore hearing to ‘normal’
- Gain the person’s attention before speaking
- Consider the pace at which you speak – allow them to absorb one piece of information before moving on to the next
- Encourage them to choose their work area so it is the best place for them
- Allow them to see your face, as they will need to make use of the extra clues to meaning that are provided by facial expressions and lip patterns
- Relay contributions from other people, whether right or wrong, as the person may not have realised who was speaking or what they said
- Give the person time to respond, they may need additional listening and thinking time

How you can help them (continued)

- Give frequent verbal and non-verbal encouragement
- Avoid moving around too much or turning away
- Speak clearly and avoid shouting, whispering and mouthing, which distorts natural rhythm and intonation
- Bear in mind that videos or online training courses may use 'voiceovers' which can be very hard to follow so provide captions where available
- Be aware that darkened rooms can be a problem for lip readers
- Avoid standing in front of a bright light or window, as your face will be in shadow and lipreading will be difficult
- Encourage the use of any technology that can be used to support with communication in the workplace
- If the individual uses an interpreter, remember to count this person into workplace arrangements (e.g. provide an additional seat and work area)

Sensory Impairment - Sight Loss

What is Sight Loss?

A visual impairment is an eye-sight difficulty that is not correctable by wearing glasses, contact lenses or surgery.

Vision is the co-ordinating sense, providing us with a wealth of information instantaneously and helping us anticipate and reinforce information gained from other senses. Because of the individual nature of impairments, it is vital we communicate with the person so that we can fully understand their challenges and support in the appropriate way.

How it might affect someone

- Difficulty with reading and writing tasks (e.g. books, hand-outs, signs, proof reading, copying)
- Difficulties with mobility and orientation around, to and from the workplace (e.g. difficulties with judging distance, speeds, depth perception, moving in crowds, difficulty reading signage, increasing risk of the falls or bumping into things and the person may also use a cane or guide dog for support)
- Difficulties with social interaction, including work participation and making friends (e.g. difficulties such as recognising non-verbal and visual features, expressions and behaviours, knowing who is in the department, when to speak and turn taking)
- Difficulty accessing information
- Difficulty accessing practical tasks for example, travelling and cooking
- Adapting to the physical environment (e.g. changing light and weather conditions, coping in busy chaotic areas)
- Many aspects of day-to-day life may require more effort, time, planning, concentration, and/or adaptive skills/equipment or technology to undertake safely, therefore increasing the levels of tiredness they may experience

How you can help them

- Talk with the employee about their condition and what help is needed
- Ask for any advice or practical tips they may have to offer
- Don't worry about saying 'nice to see you' or 'look', people who are blind and partially sighted use these phrases too
- Use lots of verbal descriptions and try to avoid phrases such as 'over there'
- Use directional instructions - 'walk to your left', 'towards me'
- Use touch appropriately when you meet and greet someone to let them know you are there and also let them know your name and who you are
- Always verbally 'sign on' when you meet someone and 'sign off' when you leave them
- Always let them know who else is around and whether they are in a small or large group
- Arrange a guided walk around your meeting place and any new venues and inform them of any changes
- When you are leading or guiding, ask the person if they require help and then ask them to grip your arm, just above the elbow and walk at their pace, tell them where you are going and verbalise any obstacles or key points on the way
- Always find out what aids are required for each individual; everyone will have different needs
- There are a variety of aids available, such as magnifying lenses, large print publications, Braille transcriptions, audio descriptions, electronic reading aids and screen readers, all available from RNIB or local societies for the blind
- Some people will use white canes for mobility and orientation, so others need to understand and be aware of them
- Ensure the workplace is kept clear and free of any obstacles and trip hazards
- If a person uses a guide dog, remember it is a working dog and should not be distracted by others
- Provide a safe space, access to water and a toilet area for the guide dog within the workplace

Speech and Language

What is Speech and Language?

Speech and language and communication needs (SLCN) means having difficulty in communicating with others. This may be because of a difficulty in saying what they want to, understanding what is being said to them or they do not understand or use social rules of communication.

The profile for every person with SLCN is different and their needs may change over time. They may have difficulty with one, some or all of the different aspects of speech, language or social communication at different times of their lives.

How it might affect someone

People who have speech and language needs will likely have difficulty with:

Attention and listening

- Difficulty in paying attention during a shared activity, to an activity for an appropriate length of time and listening to instructions whilst busy doing something else
- Can be easily distracted and tends to prefer activities of their own choosing
- Finds tasks with spoken instructions harder to complete than tasks where listening is not required

Understanding

- The understanding of abstract concepts and more complex spoken language
- Difficulty in understanding appropriate spoken instructions or carrying out multiple instructions
- Difficulty in remembering spoken information long enough to use it

How it might affect someone (continued)

Spoken language

- Will use a smaller range of words and shorter sentences, wrong words for things and/or uses general words such as 'thingy' 'that' 'put' and 'get'
- Misses out the small words and/or tends to repeat back what has been said - sounds can be muddled or disorganised when talking in longer sentences
- Will have difficulty describing events in a way that is easy for the listener to understand, as well as difficulty in structuring sentences and expressing thoughts, opinions and knowledge clearly
- Unable to use spoken language to convey their thoughts, feelings and wishes
- For those with a stammer/stutter, they may lengthen or repeat some sounds or words, or get stuck on a particular sound/word

Social Communication

- Difficulty using language in social interactions and understanding the rules of conversation
- Difficulties in maintaining a topic of conversation and responding appropriately to non-literal language, irony and jokes

Cognition, Learning and Behaviour

- May have particular strengths and difficulties or slower processing speeds (e.g. taking longer to read and understand questions)
- Difficulty in making connections, generalising skills and responding to direction
- Poor understanding of social conventions (e.g. personal space) and expectations, leading to possible social isolation
- May show literal interpretation of things
- Difficulty showing empathy, predicting own response and those of others
- Resistance to change and exhibits sign of distress (this could be due to sensory overload e.g. being overwhelmed by visual, auditory and/or physical stimulation), intense special interests and obsessive behaviour

How you can help them

- Prepare the work environment so it is communication friendly
- Try to use simple instructions, breaking these down with the use of visual aids
- Use effective communication to transition from tasks and activities throughout the working day
- Prepare for any changes of routine well in advance and prepare for the meeting by outlining what it will be about
- Be aware that certain types of humour may not be understood and they may take things literally
- Be aware that facial expressions may not reflect true feelings
- Use non-verbal clues if you are using more challenging language
- Ensure that they know that you are talking to them when talking in a group environment
- Gain their attention before talking or asking them a question - don't assume that they are already listening
- Use open questions to allow for extended responses but, if they need some support, move to closed questions
- Allow extra response time
- Let them know if you are going to be asking questions or starting a group discussion so they can prepare and formulate their thoughts and ideas

Next Steps

This toolkit has been created to help support you in understanding several types of disabilities/difficulties and what you can do to support employees in the workplace.

Next Steps

It is important that you take the time to read through this toolkit and the relevant areas but, more importantly, it is crucial that you talk to the individual employee to learn more about their disability or difficulty. They will be able to share with you how their condition affects them and what support they require. You shouldn't presume that what you have read in this toolkit applies to them, as everyone will be different and require different support.

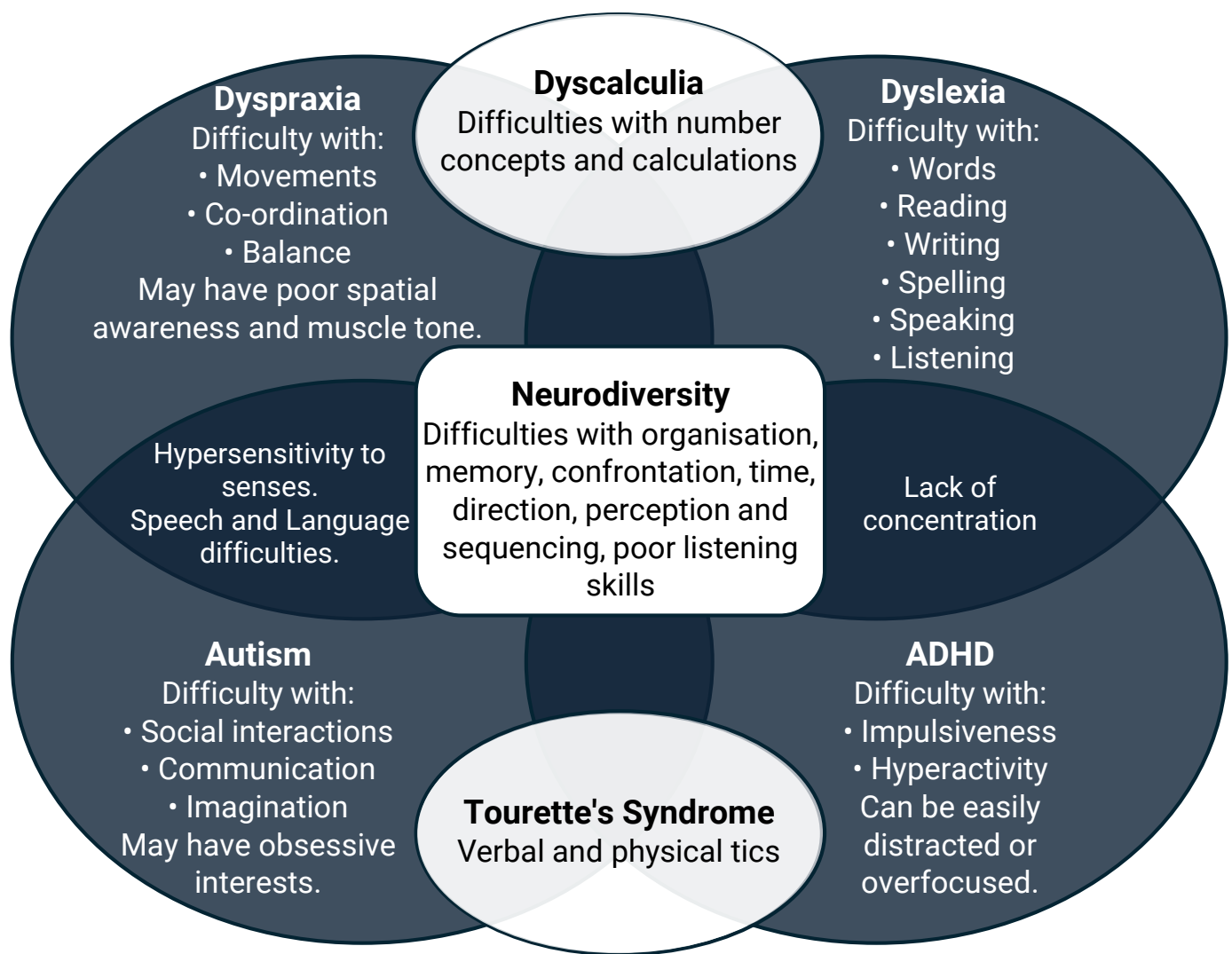
Focus on the behaviour, not the label

When understanding how you can support your employee, it is important to recognise that you will be supporting their behaviours and needs, not just their 'label'. As previously mentioned, everyone is different and will have different needs and one size does not fit all.

If you focus solely on the label of the condition, you may not be recognising or supporting the needs of that individual. A good example of this is shown within Neurodiversity. Neurodiversity encompasses a range of conditions with many sharing similar characteristics and behaviours that cross over and overlap.

On the following page, a diagram highlights the range of behaviours of several Neurodiverse conditions.

An individual may possess all of the behaviours listed, just a select few, or those of a similar condition. By focusing on the behaviour, not the label, and understanding how you as an employer can support these needs in the workplace, you will be creating a working environment that is supportive and inclusive of a range of needs.



What to do next?

- Speak to the individual
- Find out what support they require
- Look at what reasonable adjustments are required to support them in the workplace
- Are there any relevant training or awareness programmes available to train and support your employees?
- Identify what you can do to create and embrace an inclusive working environment
- Complete a self-assessment of your workplace to evaluate what you already do and what could be improved

Remember: by making workplace adjustments and creating an inclusive workplace, you'll be benefiting everyone.

More Information and Advice

Anxiety and Mental Health

- [Anxiety - NHS](#)
- [Mind](#)

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

- [Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder \(ADHD\) - NHS](#)
- [ADHD UK](#)

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

- [Autism - NHS](#)
- [National Autistic Society](#)

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

- [Myalgic encephalomyelitis or chronic fatigue syndrome \(ME/CFS\) - NHS](#)
- [The ME Association](#)

Diabetes

- [Diabetes - NHS](#)
- [Diabetes UK](#)

Dyscalculia

- [Dyscalculia - NHS](#)
- [Dyscalculia - British Dyslexia Association](#)

Dyslexia

- [Dyslexia - NHS](#)
- [British Dyslexia Association](#)

Dyspraxia

- [Dyspraxia - NHS](#)
- [Dyspraxia - The Brain Charity](#)

Epilepsy

- [Epilepsy - NHS](#)
- [Epilepsy Action](#)

Moderate Learning Disability (MLD)

- [Learning disabilities - NHS](#)
- [Mencap](#)

Physical Disability

- [Disability charity Scope UK](#)

Sensory Impairment - Hearing Loss

- [Hearing loss - NHS](#)
- [RNID - National hearing loss charity](#)

Sensory Impairment - Sight Loss

- [Blindness and vision loss - NHS](#)
- [RNIB - Royal National Institute of Blind People](#)

Speech and Language

- [Speech and Language UK](#)



Disclaimer:

Please note that while every effort has been made to ensure the content in this document is accurate, the information has been provided by various external organisations and may be subject to change without the knowledge of INclusive Worcestershire.

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Get in Touch

To find out more or share your interest in becoming a disability confident employer, contact the INclusive Worcestershire team at:
inclusiveemployment@worcestershire.gov.uk