

Universal Support Resource Guide

At Spectrum Advantage, we recognize the importance of creating workplaces where people with different ways of thinking, learning, and communicating can succeed. This resource guide has been developed to support employers who are interested in strengthening inclusive practices and building environments where all employees can contribute their strengths. Rather than focusing only on individual accommodations, this guide highlights universal supports—practices that benefit many employees, including neurodivergent individuals. Universal supports help create clearer communication, more flexible work environments, and stronger team collaboration across organizations.

By adopting neuroinclusive approaches, employers can improve workplace culture, expand access to talent, and support employees in reaching their full potential.

This toolkit is designed to provide practical guidance and tools to help employers reflect on their current practices and explore strategies for creating more inclusive and supportive workplaces. Inside, you will find resources, worksheets, and planning tools that can help your organization take meaningful steps toward a more inclusive and adaptable work environment. We hope this guide supports your team in building workplaces where diverse perspectives and strengths are recognized and valued.

ABOUT US **PAGE 2-3**

Get to know Spectrum Advantage and how it can revolutionize your approach to inclusive hiring.

NEURO-INCLUSIVE SIGNS **PAGE 9-12**

Explore creative ways to acknowledge and celebrate neurodivergence in your workplace. Pages 6-8 offer ready-to-use signs that can be strategically placed in areas where employees congregate.

UNIVERSAL SUPPORTS TOOLS **PAGE 4-8**

Equip your management team with practical tools to support employees with a wide range of working and communication styles. These resources focus on universal supports—clear communication, consistent practices, and flexible approaches—that help create an inclusive environment where all employees can succeed.

PERSONAL USER MANUAL **PAGE 13-15**

The last few pages of the toolkit include a valuable tool we use at Spectrum Advantage. This assessment helps you better understand the needs of individuals on the autism spectrum and how they work best, facilitating a harmonious and productive work environment.



A 16-week initiative that helps employers see the advantages of hiring people who live on the autism spectrum.

ABOUT US

Spectrum Advantage was created in response to the need for employment experience for individuals with autism between the ages of 18 and 30. This groundbreaking program—the only one of its kind in Canada—opened its doors in May 2014. As of 2026, Spectrum Advantage has served over 300 participants and has partnered with businesses in the community ranging from local bakeries to engineering companies and large national and international franchises.

The unique qualities of autistic minds often make for excellent employees. Sadly, 85% of university/post-secondary educated adults living on the autism spectrum are unemployed and underemployed. Spectrum Advantage offers companies an opportunity to connect with an untapped, undiscovered talent pool and benefit from their distinct perspectives. Our initiative offers qualified individuals the opportunity to gain valuable professional work experience.

AUTISM 101 TRAINING

We offer an Autism 101 information session to teach businesses about neurological differences, how they present in the workplace, and how to create an environment of universal support that benefits ALL employees, not just neurodivergent employees.



1 IN 50

Canadians diagnosed with autism



60%

Employers report they don't know how to support their autistic employees.



Qualified Employees



Financial Subsidy



Diversity Training

WHAT WE OFFER

No Recruitment Costs

We will manage the entire recruitment process and provide appropriately skilled employees at no cost to your business.

Specialized Training

Our four-week classroom training provides young professionals the tools they need to become successful employees.

Offset Training Cost

In the first twelve weeks of an internship, employers are offered a financial stipend to offset any additional training costs.

Employment Coaching

We will help to bridge any gaps between employers and employees for the first twelve weeks.

Autism 101 Overview

About:

A comprehensive hour-long training designed to empower businesses with a deeper understanding of autism in the workplace and the concept of universal supports.

Schedule your team's autism training today!

01

Understanding Autism & Neurodivergence

- What do you know about autism?
- Autism in the media vs. real life
- Autism as a neurological difference
- The diversity of autistic experiences and workplace needs



02

Recognizing Bias in Hiring

- Bias is natural but often unconscious
- We tend to hire people we feel comfortable with

03

Tips & Tools

- Job Design & Job Postings
- Neuro-Inclusive Interviewing: small adjustments that allow candidates to show their abilities more effectively

04

Universal Supports

- What are Universal Supports?
- Universal Supports in practice: Simple adjustments that improve workplace functioning

05

The Business Case for Neuro-Inclusion

- Autistic and neurodivergent strengths
- Research and organizational outcomes

The Universal Supports Process

Many workplace supports are universal practices that benefit everyone, while some situations may require individualized solutions.

01. Recognize Opportunities for Support

- Inclusive workplaces proactively consider how policies, environments, and communication styles may affect employees.
- Employees, candidates, or managers may identify opportunities to improve support and reduce workplace barriers.
- Creating open conversations about support helps ensure employees can perform at their best.



02. Assess Workplace Needs

Discuss with the employee what workplace factors may affect their ability to perform their role effectively. This may include:

- communication preferences
- workload structure
- workspace environment
- existing supports that have worked well in the past



03. Make an Informed Decision

Consider solutions that are practical, flexible, and supportive for both the employee and the workplace.

- clearer communication practices
- structured expectations
- environmental adjustments
- flexible work approaches



04. Implement Supports & Follow up

Communicate clearly about:

- what support will be provided
- how it will be implemented
- when it will begin

Regular check-ins help ensure workplace supports remain effective.

Workplace needs may change over time, and supports may be adjusted as roles, responsibilities, or environments evolve.



What Universal Supports Might Look Like

Simple supports that benefit neurodivergent employees – and often everyone in the workplace.



Flexible Work Practices

- Allowing movement during meetings
- Recording meetings for later review



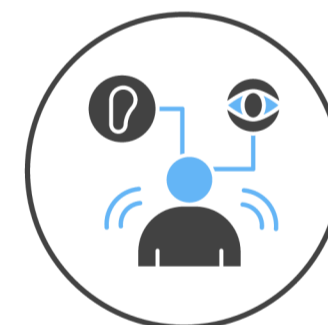
Structured Support

Weekly check-ins to review progress, priorities, and questions



Clear Communication

- Providing written instructions
- Using a prioritization matrix to clarify tasks and deadlines



Sensory-Friendly Options

- Access to quiet spaces for sensory breaks
- Noise-cancelling headphones
- Fidget tools to support focus

Universal supports create workplaces where different thinking styles, communication preferences, and sensory needs are respected and supported. Small adjustments can make a big difference.

“How Do You Work Best?”

Conversation starters to assess reasonable support for employees

It is important to talk about what will help create a supportive workplace with ALL employees – discuss with the employee what options are available to adjust the physical and sensory environment to improve productivity (e.g., have a premade list of examples like noise cancelling headphones, a sit-stand desk, and desk lamps instead of overhead lighting; and make it clear that the organization is open to personalized adjustments if needed)



Workspace

What workspace conditions contribute to your productivity, well-being, and success? Are there any changes or additions you'd like to see?

Feel free to consider these as examples; not all may be relevant to your employees or workspace.



Physical

Do you have a preference for natural light, or is there a specific lighting setup that helps you work comfortably? Is there a temperature range that suits you best?

Accessibility

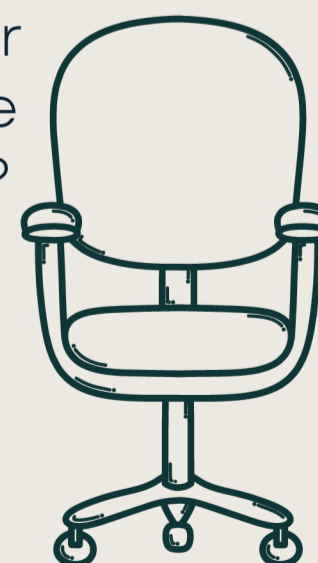
Are there specific chair or desk preferences that contribute to your comfort and focus? Do you require any ergonomic tools or equipment to enhance your work experience?

Noise Levels

Are there specific chair or desk preferences that contribute to your comfort and focus? Do you require any ergonomic tools or equipment to enhance your work experience?

Ergonomics

Are there specific chair or desk preferences that contribute to your comfort and focus? Do you require any ergonomic tools or equipment to enhance your work experience?



“How Do You Work Best?”

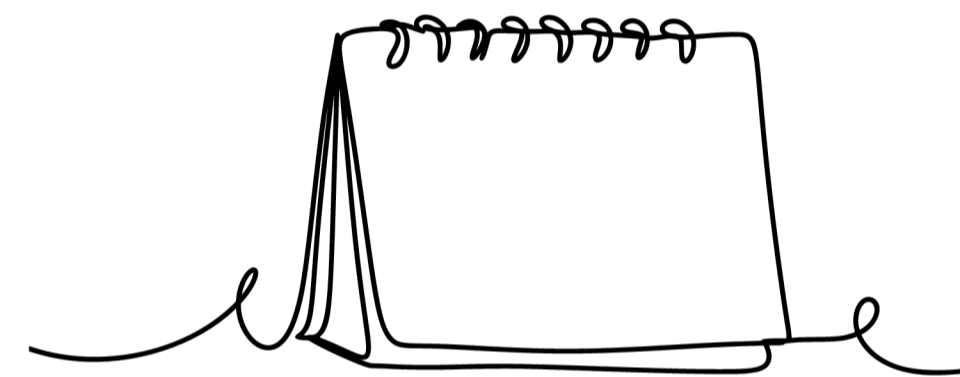
Conversation starters to assess reasonable support for employees



Communication

Do you have a preference for certain channels or methods? Are there ways we can improve the flow of information for you?

Availability



How do you manage your availability for communication? Are there specific times or situations when you prefer not to be disturbed or contacted? How can we respect your communication boundaries?

Channels

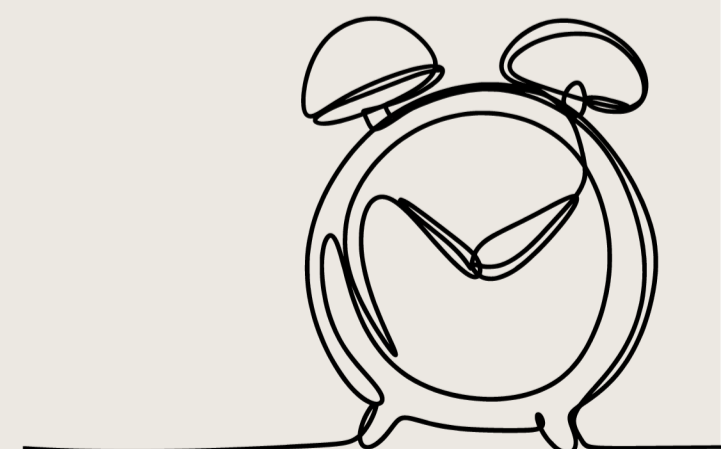
What communication channels do you find most effective? Email, messaging apps, video calls, or in-person discussions & meetings?

Feedback

How do you prefer to receive feedback? Is real-time feedback more effective for you, or do you prefer scheduled feedback sessions?

Response Time

What are your expectations regarding response times to messages or emails?



“How Do You Work Best?”

Conversation starters to assess reasonable support for employees

Flexibility

Would a 15 minute window of flex time suit your needs for accommodation?



Work Times



Are there specific work hours that you find most productive, or would you prefer flexibility in your start or end times?

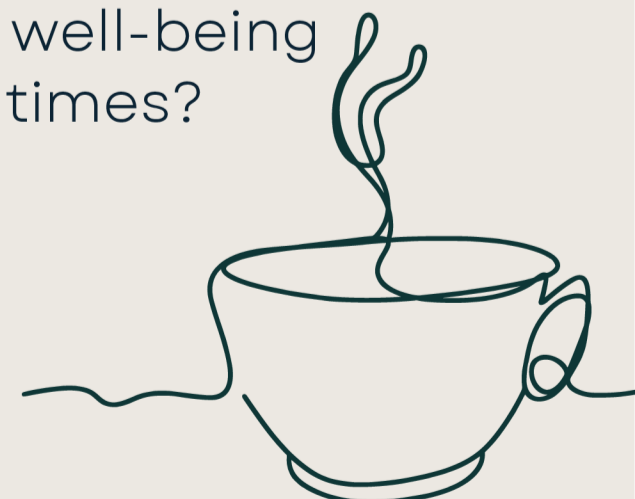
Remote

Given the option, do you find remote work more suitable for certain tasks? Are there specific conditions at home that contribute to your productivity?



Break Times

Are there specific break or rest periods that you find most beneficial during the workday? How can we support your well-being during these times?



Neurodivergent Workplace Assets

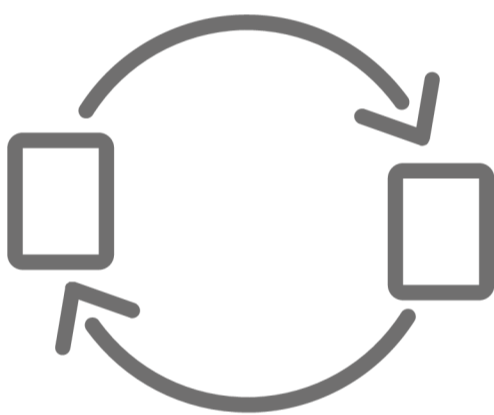
We employ individuals with neurological differences and treat everyone with dignity and respect. Statistics indicate that 1 in 5 individuals are neurodivergent. These differences present in a variety of ways.

Strong Logic & Analytical Skills



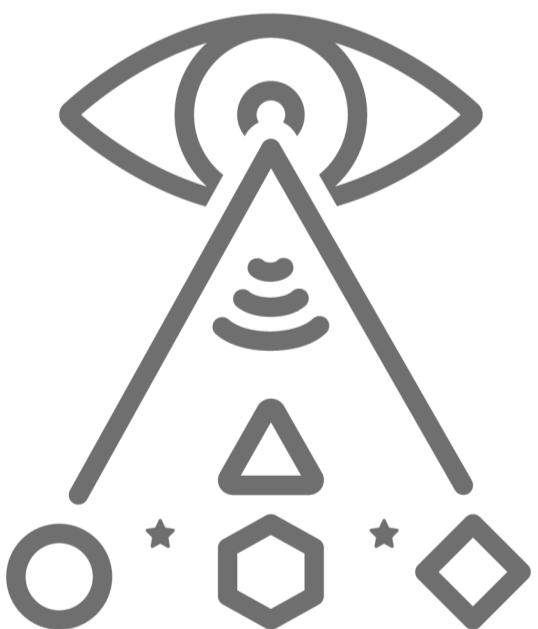
These skills are valuable in problem-solving, strategic planning, and tasks that require a methodical approach.

Tolerance for Repetitive Tasks



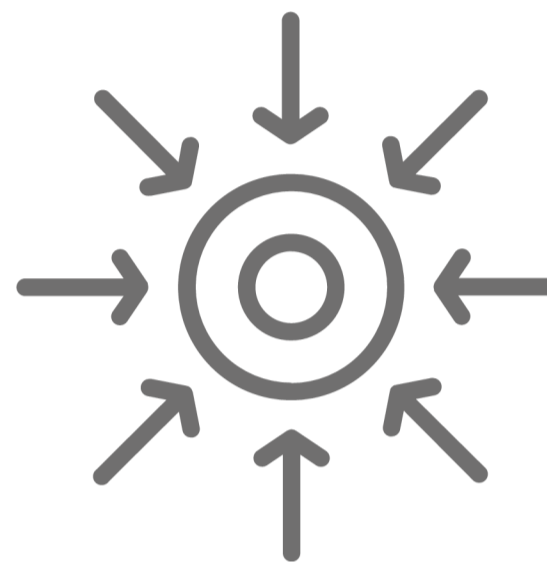
This is helpful in roles that involve routine, precision, and consistency, such as data entry, quality assurance, or manufacturing.

Accuracy with Visual Perception



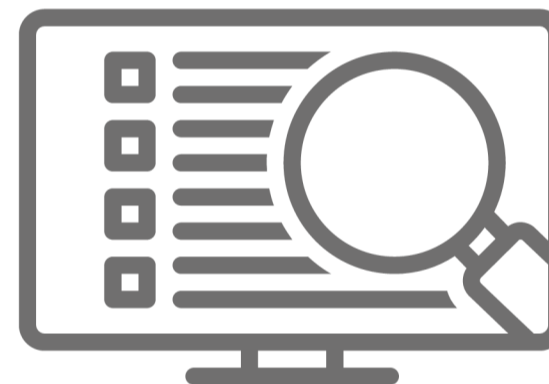
This can be advantageous in tasks that require attention to detail, such as graphic design, quality control, or data analysis.

Concentration



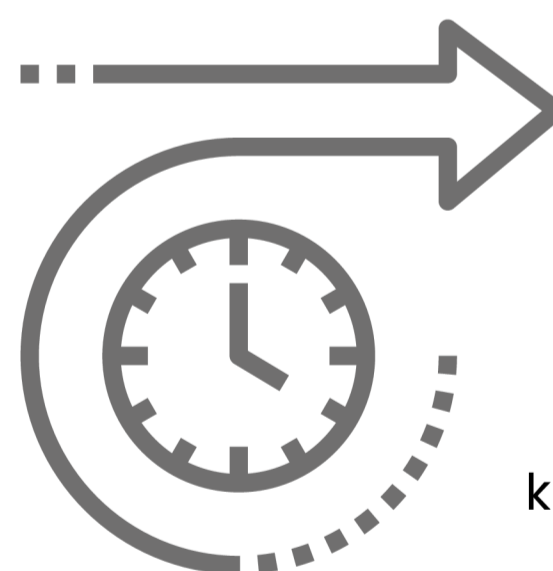
This allows individuals to focus intensely on tasks for extended periods. This ability can enhance productivity and efficiency, especially in roles that demand sustained attention.

Attention to Detail



This skill is invaluable in roles that require precision, accuracy, and a meticulous approach, such as software testing, proofreading, or scientific research.

Long-Term Memory



This enables employees to retain and recall information over extended periods. This asset is beneficial in roles where historical knowledge or complex information retention is crucial.

WAYS TO SUPPORT NEURODIVERGENCE



Strategic Role Placements

Capitalize on neurodivergent employees' strong logic and analytical skills by placing them in roles that require these abilities



Structured Work Environments

Minimize distractions, provide quiet workspaces, and establish clear and structured workflows. This allows neurodivergent employees to channel their focus effectively.



Skills Development

Providing opportunities for skill development and growth within their areas of strength ensures that they continue to thrive and contribute meaningfully to the organization

We are a Neuro-Inclusive Workplace

We employ individuals with neurological differences and treat everyone with dignity and respect. Statistics indicate that 1 in 5 individuals are neurodivergent. These differences present in a variety of ways.

Differences in Eye-Contact



This can range from avoiding eye-contact to prolonged eye-contact

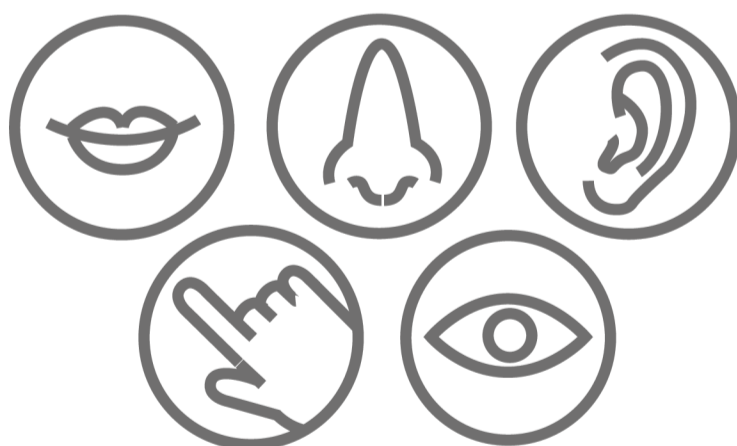
Processing Verbal Requests

This may require extra time and including written instructions.



Sensory Sensitivities

This might present as sensitivities to sights, sounds, tastes or touch



Routine Oriented

This may require giving extra notice when making changes to routine and giving grace as they adjust



Reciprocity in Conversation

This may look like talking too much or too little, interrupting, or a delayed response



Disguised Anxiety

This may look like asking too many questions or too few. Taking no breaks or working late.



WAYS TO SUPPORT NEURODIVERGENT INDIVIDUALS



Schedule Check-Ins

Pre-determined check-in times to ask questions and/or prioritize tasks. Provide forewarning to any changes.



Be Clear and Concise

Give clear and direct feedback about inappropriate behaviours. Be concrete with instructions.

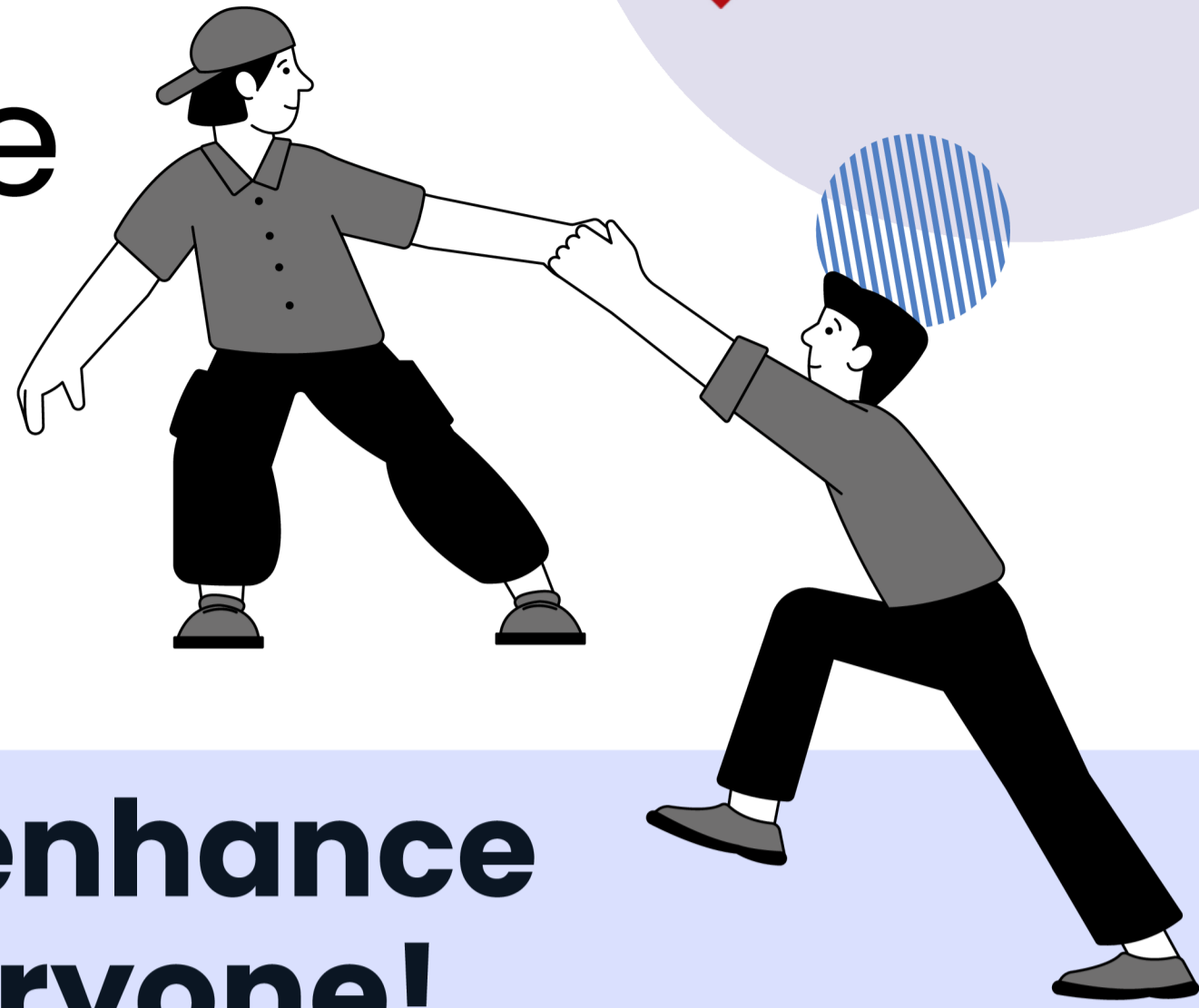


Tools and Tips

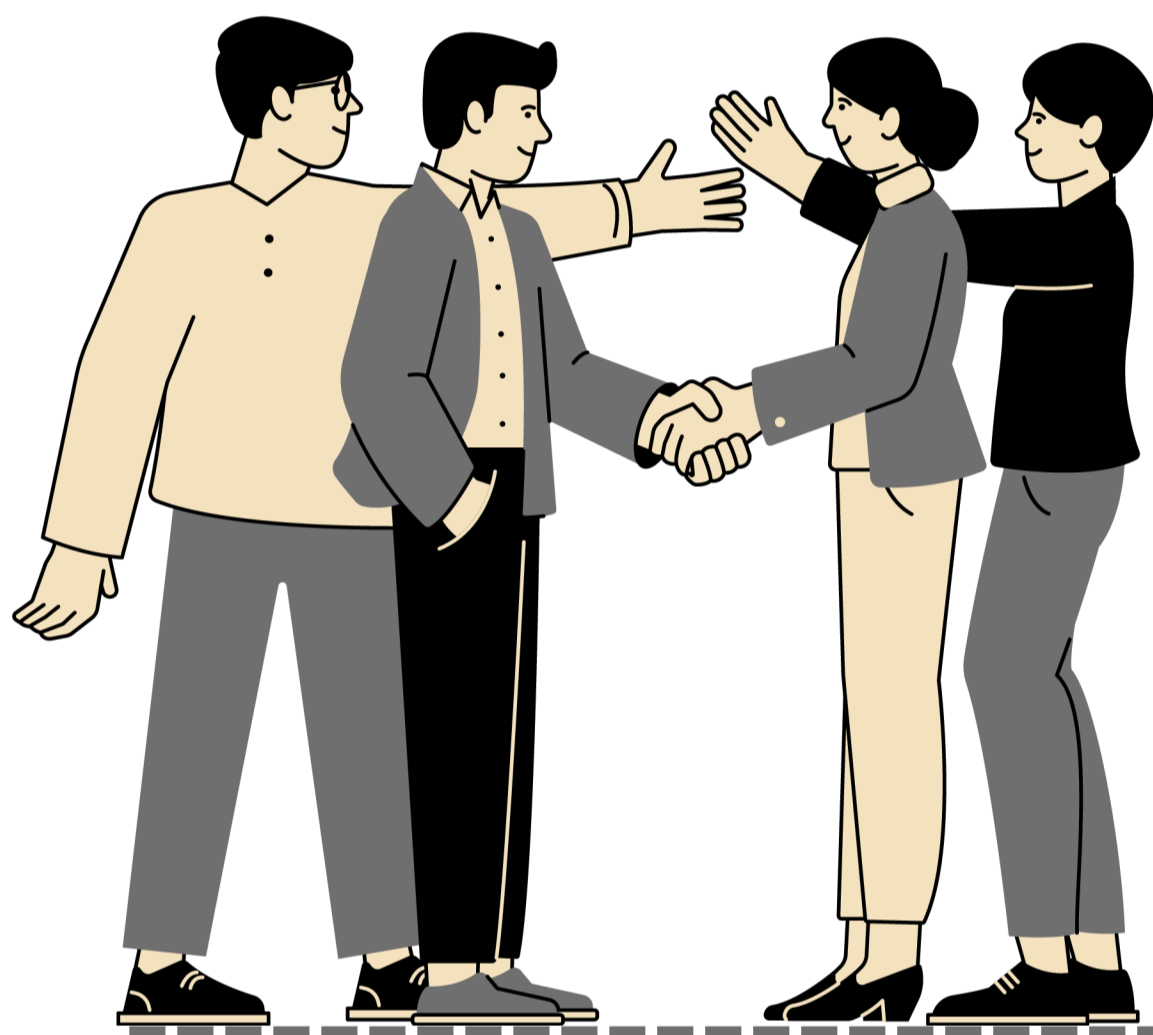
Provide tools and systems for organization. Some examples include spreadsheets, note-taking tools, and discreet fidgets.

We are a Neuro-Inclusive Workplace

Neuro-inclusive workplaces recognize that people think, process, and communicate differently. By implementing universal supports, organizations can create environments where **all** employees feel comfortable contributing, asking questions, and working in ways that align with their strengths.



Let's work together to enhance communication for everyone!



Respect is Key!

When organizations acknowledge and support different communication styles, they build environments where everyone can participate more comfortably and effectively. Understanding these differences helps teams communicate more clearly, reduce misunderstandings, and support collaboration across diverse working styles. Small, proactive supports can improve communication for everyone.

Social Pragmatics

CONSIDER THESE

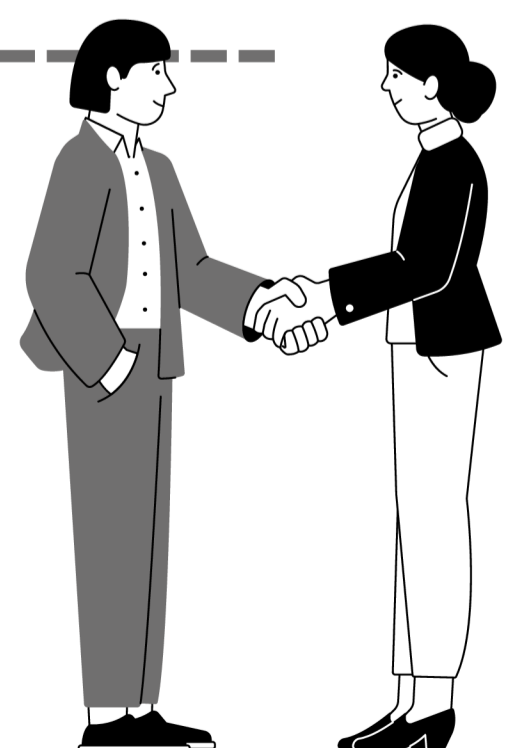
People may vary in how they:

- Interpret social cues
- Take turns in conversation
- Adjust language depending on the situation
- Understand humor, sarcasm, or figurative language

What Can Impact Workplace Communication?

- Stress and workload may influence how people communicate and participate in meetings.
- Personality differences (e.g., introversion and extroversion) affect communication styles.
- Environmental factors such as noise, temperature, lighting, and other stimuli can impact focus and interaction.

- 1 Be mindful of using euphemisms, analogies and expressions. Provide clarification when using sarcasm.
- 2 Pay attention to the environment and try to minimize overwhelming stimuli.
- 3 Clearly communicate that attendance at social events is optional



Sensory Stimuli In the Workplace

Sensory processing issues, can influence how individuals respond to sensory stimuli. Sensory sensitivities may impact attention, focus, and comfort levels in the workplace.



VISUAL (sight)

- Bright lights
- Colors and patterns
- Moving objects
- Visual patterns or textures

Suggestions

Allow employees to use dark glasses, florescent light filter covers, or blue screen light filters. Provide adjustable lighting options and/or visually soothing break spaces.



TACTILE (touch)

- Textures (smooth, rough, soft, etc.)
- Temperature (hot, cold)
- Pressure or contact with surfaces

Suggestions

Allow the use of discreet fidget tools like stress balls, fidget spinners, or textured items to help with tactile stimulation. Allow the use of desk accessories such as fidget mats or textured desk covers. Provide portable heaters when possible.



AUDITORY (hearing)

- Loud noises or sounds
- Soft or soothing music
- Speech and conversation
- Background noise in a crowded place

Suggestions

Noise cancelling headphones, earplugs, quiet spaces. If possible, turn down overhead music and phone ringers.

Implement a policy that encourages respectful noise levels in shared spaces.



OLFACTORY (smell)

- Pleasant or unpleasant odors
- Perfumes or scented products
- Cooking smells
- Environmental smells (e.g., nature, pollution)

Suggestions

Implement scent-free policies to minimize the use of strong perfumes or scented products in the workplace. Consider air purifiers or filters to help reduce odors in shared spaces



PROPRIOCEPTIVE (body position & movement)

- Body movement
- Pressure on joints and muscles
- Body position and balance

Suggestions

Offer ergonomic and comfortable seating options. Allow employees to use seat cushions or backrests for tactile comfort. Provide desks with adjustable positioning (i.e.; sit-stand desks)

Multi-sensory situations can be challenging!

Be mindful that sensory information may impact others differently than they impact you.

Spectrum Advantage

Personal User Manual

“The best way to understand others is to make sure you understand yourself.”

Often, when companies begin the journey of hiring more inclusively, it is easy to become more focused on the differences rather than the similarities between neurotypical and neurodivergent employees. The truth is, we all have different work place needs and work styles.

Research shows that businesses that create inclusive environments that are flexible, creative, collaborative, and can adapt and respond to the unique needs of all employees, experience a significant return on investment.

At Spectrum Advantage, we believe the best path to understanding others is to work on understanding ourselves. Creating a Personal User Guide is a fantastic team building activity that will allow individual team members to better understand their own workplace preferences as well as their team members individual needs.

Universal Supports not only benefit individual employees but contributes to a positive and productive work environment for everyone.



Personal User Manual

We have created a list of important questions to consider when creating a Personal User Manual to onboard new employees. For each question, provide space for 3-5 bullet point responses. Consider saving each user manual for reference when working with individual employees.

Personal User Manual

INFORMATION

Name

First Name

Last Name

Date of Birth

Pronouns

Phone

Home Phone

Mobile Phone

Conditions I like to work in :

1. E.x; I like having my own desk space, I tend to prefer corner cubicles or an office so I can focus better.

4.

2.

5.

3.

6.

I feel my most productive when :

1. E.x; Mornings are my best productivity time, , so I like to arrive early and get right to work

4.

2.

5.

3.

6.

How I learn best:

1. E.x; In group meetings, I like to take in all the information and chew it over before I respond

4.

2.

5.

3.

6.

Personal User Manual

The best way to communicate with me:

1. E.x; Getting topics ahead of meetings helps me better prepare and contribute more effectively on the spot.

4.

2.

5.

3.

6.

The ways I like to receive feedback:

1. E.x; Timely feedback is extremely helpful so that the context is fresh in my mind.

4.

2.

5.

3.

6.

Things I need to be successful:

1. E.x; Brain breaks throughout the day in a different space. Feel free to join me for a walk.

4.

2.

5.

3.

6.

Common Misconceptions:

1. E.x; I am not very expressive so people tend to interpret me as grumpy or hard to read. If I am not happy, I will say so, otherwise just assume I am fine!

2.

3.

Other things to know about me:

E.x; In my spare time, I love cooking, hiking and playing video games!

Name & Signature

Date

