Get Your Message Across

Disclosing Your Neurodivergence at Work: A Guide for Job Seekers

Finding a job that supports your needs is important. Deciding when and how to disclose your neurodivergence can impact your experience at work. This guide helps you navigate disclosure safely.

1. Understand Your Rights

- In the UK, neurodivergent people may be protected under the Equality Act 2010, which makes it unlawful for employers to discriminate against disabled employees or job applicants. This means an employer should not refuse to hire, dismiss, or treat you unfairly because of your neurodivergence.
- You are not required to disclose unless you need accommodations. For example, if you struggle with sensory overload and need a quiet workspace, disclosure may be necessary to request adjustments.
- Employers have a legal duty to consider reasonable adjustments if a condition has a substantial impact on your ability to carry out your role. Examples include modifying work schedules, providing written instructions instead of verbal, or offering assistive technology.

2. Consider Your Reasons for Disclosure

Ask yourself:

- Do I need accommodations to succeed? If your job requires skills that are impacted by your neurodivergence, such as time management or sensory processing, disclosure may help you obtain the tools you need to thrive.
- Will disclosure improve my work environment? If disclosing will allow you to work in a more supportive and understanding environment, it may be worth considering.
- Am I comfortable discussing my neurodivergence? If sharing feels stressful or if you're unsure how it will be received, you might choose to wait.

You do not need to disclose if you don't want to. Only share if it benefits you. Some neurodivergent individuals prefer to disclose only when absolutely necessary, while others find that being open creates a better workplace experience.

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3. Choose the Right Time

- **Before accepting a job** – If accommodations are critical from day one, such as needing a remote work arrangement, it may be best to disclose early.
- **After starting** – Once you understand the workplace culture, you can decide if and when to disclose. For instance, if your employer encourages inclusivity, disclosure may feel safer.
- **When facing challenges** – If struggles arise that require support, such as difficulty with social interactions or executive functioning, disclosure may be the right choice.

There is no single "right" time. It depends on your comfort and needs. Some individuals choose to disclose only when they realise their job performance is being affected.

4. Decide Who to Tell

- **HR Department** – Best for formal accommodations, such as extra time for tasks or alternative communication methods.
- **Manager or Supervisor** – If you need direct support, such as adjustments in workflow or deadlines.
- **Trusted Colleagues** – If seeking informal support, such as understanding during team projects.

Keep it professional and focused on workplace needs. Avoid disclosing personal details unless necessary, and tailor the conversation to how accommodations can help you perform your best.

5. How to Disclose

Use clear, professional language. Focus on strengths and accommodations:

- "I work best with clear written instructions." If verbal instructions are difficult to process, suggest alternative communication methods.
- "I need noise-cancelling headphones to focus." This is helpful in open office environments where distractions are frequent.
- "Structured schedules help me stay on track." If time management is a challenge, propose using task lists or calendar reminders.

You do not need to name a diagnosis. Just explain what helps you work effectively. Keeping the conversation centred on workplace adjustments ensures that the focus remains on performance, not personal details.

6. Know Your Accommodation Options

Common workplace accommodations include:

- Flexible work hours – If strict schedules cause difficulty, an employer may allow for adjusted start and end times.
- Quiet workspaces – Noise sensitivity can impact productivity, so requesting a private or low-traffic area can be beneficial.
- Written instructions – If auditory processing is a challenge, having step-by-step written guides can help.
- Assistive technology – Tools such as speech-to-text software or task management apps can improve efficiency.
- Extra time for tasks – If processing speed or executive function is impacted, requesting extended deadlines may be reasonable.

You can request accommodations at any time. If your needs change, adjustments can be reviewed.

7. Prepare for Different Reactions

Some employers will be supportive. Others may lack understanding. Be ready to:

- Educate them about your needs. If they are unfamiliar with neurodivergence, provide resources or examples.
- Advocate for yourself. If accommodations are initially denied, calmly explain why they are necessary for your job performance.
- Seek legal advice if discrimination occurs. If you believe your employer is acting unfairly, consult with a disability rights organisation or attorney.

Having a plan for different reactions can make disclosure feel less intimidating.

8. Keep Records

- Document requests and responses. Keep a written record of all conversations regarding accommodations.
- Keep emails or meeting notes. If you have a conversation with HR, follow up with an email summarising key points.
- If denied accommodations, ask for written explanations. This can help if you need to file a complaint or seek legal advice.

Having records helps if issues arise. It ensures clarity and accountability on both sides.

9. Seek Support

- Disability or neurodiversity advocacy organisations
- Neurodivergent community groups offer peer support and advice from those with similar experiences.
- Career coaches who specialise in neurodiversity can help you navigate workplace challenges and disclosure decisions.

You don't have to navigate this alone. Reaching out to trusted sources can help you feel more confident in your decisions.

10. Trust Yourself

You deserve a workplace that supports you. Disclosure is a personal decision—do what feels right for you. If an employer does not respect your needs, consider whether it's the right workplace for you.