

Avoiding Tokenism in Neurodiversity Inclusion

TL;DR · QUICK SUMMARY

- Neurodivergent employees are individuals, not representatives for an entire community.
- Lived experience can be valuable, but sharing it should always be a choice.
- Genuine inclusion values people for their expertise, strengths and contribution, not just their diagnosis.
- Creating an inclusive culture is everyone's responsibility, not the responsibility of neurodivergent employees.

A Note Before You Read On

This resource offers general guidance and reflects common experience, not professional, legal, medical or financial advice. It is not a substitute for employment law, HR policy, occupational health guidance, or individual professional assessment. Every person's experience of neurodivergence is different, so please adapt anything here to your own situation. The Uniquely Wired Network does not accept liability for decisions, actions or outcomes arising from the use of this material. If you need advice specific to your circumstances, please consult a qualified professional (e.g. HR, legal, medical, or financial advisor).

Why This Matters

As workplace awareness grows, neurodivergent employees can sometimes find themselves under pressure to educate others or represent an entire group.

While some people enjoy sharing their experiences, others do not.

True inclusion gives people a choice.

What This Might Look Like

- Expecting one employee to explain neurodiversity to the team.

- Assuming someone's experience reflects all neurodivergent people.
- Frequently asking one person for a "neurodivergent perspective."
- Focusing more on a diagnosis than the person's professional expertise.
- Inviting someone to participate in awareness activities without giving them a genuine choice.

What You Can Do

1. Keep participation voluntary.

- Ask, don't assume.
- Make it clear there's no pressure.
- Respect a "no thank you."

2. Share responsibility.

- Use external training providers.
- Invest in manager education.
- Encourage collective learning.

3. Value the whole person.

- Recognise expertise alongside lived experience.
- Celebrate skills and achievements.
- Avoid defining people by a diagnosis.

Helpful Phrases You Can Borrow

"Only if you're comfortable sharing your experience."

"There's absolutely no expectation for you to educate others."

"We value your expertise and contribution, not just your perspective on neurodiversity."

Quick Tips

- One person cannot represent everyone.
- Lived experience is valuable but voluntary.
- Avoid making assumptions.
- Respect boundaries and privacy.
- Include neurodivergent voices without creating pressure.
- Invest in wider organisational education.
- Focus on belonging rather than visibility.
- Review workplace inclusion and wellbeing initiatives.

Want to Know More?

- See our companion guide: Building Neurodivergent-Inclusive Cultures
- See our companion guide: Safe Conversations About Neurodivergence
- See our companion guide: Building Neurodivergent-Inclusive Cultures
- Speak with HR about any existing budget, precedent, or policy for funding support.

Before You Go

Inclusive workplaces don't rely on one person to carry the responsibility for change.

They create environments where everyone can contribute in ways that feel comfortable and sustainable.

The goal isn't visibility at all costs.

It's belonging.