

How to Open Neurodivergence Conversations

TL;DR · QUICK SUMMARY

- Opening a conversation about neurodivergence — whether someone discloses to you, or you've noticed something worth checking in on — doesn't need a script you follow word-for-word.
- It needs the right intention: curiosity, privacy, and no pressure.
- This guide covers how to start well.

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

How a conversation opens often decides how honest the rest of it will be.

A rushed, public, or assumption-loaded opener can shut someone down before they've said anything.

A calm, private, low-pressure opener makes it far more likely someone tells you what would actually help.

What This Might Look Like

- Someone hints at a diagnosis in passing and you're unsure whether to follow up.
- You've noticed a pattern and want to check in without making it a big moment.

- Someone asks for a private word after a meeting, looking nervous.
- A team member emails you asking to “talk about something” with no further detail.

What You Can Do

1. Choose the right time and place.

- Always in private — never in front of other colleagues, even casually.
- Pick a moment without time pressure on either side.

2. Let them lead on detail.

- Ask open questions rather than guessing at a diagnosis or condition.
- Don't ask for more detail than they've chosen to share.

3. Make the purpose clear and low-stakes.

- Frame the conversation around support, not evaluation or concern about performance.
- Reassure them early that this won't be shared without their permission.

Helpful Phrases You Can Borrow

Opening after someone hints at something:

“You mentioned something briefly earlier — no pressure at all, but if it's useful to talk it through, I'm happy to listen.”

Initiating a check-in based on a pattern you've noticed:

“I wanted to check in privately — not about performance, just about whether there's anything that would make things easier for you day to day.”

Quick Tips

- Always have these conversations in private, never in passing or in front of others.
- Let the person set the pace and level of detail.
- Frame the opener around support, not concern or evaluation.
- Reassure confidentiality early, not as an afterthought.
- Don't fill silence with guesses — let them speak first where possible.
- A calm, unhurried tone matters more than exact wording.

Want to Know More?

- See our companion guide: “What NOT to Say” for common missteps to avoid.
- See “Confidentiality & Trust” for what happens after the conversation.
- See “Psychological Safety Frameworks” for building this into everyday team culture.

Before You Go

You don't need perfect words — you need patience, privacy, and genuine curiosity.

Getting the opening right makes everything that follows easier for both of you.