

What Is Neurodivergence?

TL;DR · QUICK SUMMARY

- Neurodivergence means a brain that works differently to what's considered "typical." It includes autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, OCD, Tourette's and more.
- It's not a disorder to fix - it's a natural variation in how people think and work.
- Around 1 in 7 people are neurodivergent, so you're already managing or working alongside ND people.

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

You don't need clinical training to support neurodivergent colleagues well.

You just need a basic, accurate picture — and a willingness to ask rather than assume.

Getting this right helps you retain good people, avoid unintentional discrimination, and build a team that actually works better.

What This Might Look Like

- A team member who does brilliant deep-focus work but goes quiet and drained after back-to-back meetings.

- Someone who asks for instructions in writing rather than relying on what was said in a meeting.
- A colleague who seems highly capable but tells you privately they're "just about holding it together."
- Someone who notices details others miss, or solves problems in an unexpected way.

What You Can Do

1. Learn the basics, not the diagnosis.

- Neurodivergence is an umbrella term, not one condition.
- You don't need to know someone's specific diagnosis to support them well.

2. Focus on how someone works best, not on labels.

- Ask what helps, rather than guessing based on what you've read or heard.
- Two autistic people, or two people with ADHD, can need very different things.

3. Treat it as a normal part of team diversity.

- Avoid language that implies something is "wrong" or needs fixing.
- Model comfortable, matter-of-fact conversations about working styles.

Helpful Phrases You Can Borrow

When someone discloses to you:

"Thanks for telling me — I appreciate the trust. What would be most helpful for me to know or do differently?"

When you're unsure what to say:

"I don't know much about this yet, but I'd like to understand what works best for you."

Quick Tips

- Neurodivergent is an umbrella term — not one condition.
- 1 in 7 people are thought to be neurodivergent.
- A diagnosis isn't required for someone's needs to be genuine.
- Struggles usually come from mismatched environments, not lower capability.
- Neurodivergence can be visible, invisible, constant or situational.
- You don't need to be an expert — just curious and willing to adapt.

Want to Know More?

- See our companion guide: "Business Case & Psychological Safety" for why this matters beyond individual kindness.
- "Common Myths vs Reality" to check your own assumptions.
- Speak with HR about any neurodiversity or wellbeing policies already in place.

Before You Go

You don't need to have this fully figured out to be a good manager on this topic. Curiosity, flexibility and a willingness to ask are the real foundation.