

Open Office Survival Strategies

TL;DR · QUICK SUMMARY

- Open-plan offices can be especially demanding for sensory and attention differences.
- Small, practical strategies can meaningfully reduce daily sensory load.
- Combine environmental tweaks (headphones, seating) with pacing strategies (breaks, quiet time).
- It's reasonable to ask for small changes without needing to disclose a diagnosis.

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

Open-plan layouts are common but rarely designed with sensory or attention differences in mind. Practical coping strategies can make a real difference while longer-term adjustments are explored.

What This Might Look Like

- Struggling to concentrate over background chatter and movement.
- Feeling drained by the end of the day from constant low-level stimulation.
- Avoiding the office on particularly demanding days, if that's an option.

Environmental Strategies

- Noise-cancelling or noise-reducing headphones, even without playing anything.
- Sitting away from high-traffic areas (doors, kitchens, printers) where possible.
- Using screens, plants, or desk positioning to reduce visual distraction.
- Booking a quiet room or pod for focused tasks when available.

Pacing Strategies

- Scheduling short breaks away from your desk to reset sensory input.
- Doing the most demanding tasks earlier, when your capacity is often higher.
- Batching similar tasks together to reduce constant context-switching.
- Using calendar blocks to protect quieter, less interrupted working time.

Helpful Phrases You Can Borrow

You don't have to use these exact words. Take what fits and leave the rest.

"I concentrate much better with headphones on. I hope that's okay even without music playing."

"Would it be possible to book the quiet room for an hour when I need deep focus?"

Quick Tips

- You don't need to disclose anything to use headphones or take breaks.
- Small, repeatable habits often help more than one big change.
- Notice your own peak-focus times and protect them where you can.
- Ask colleagues respectfully about shared space norms (e.g. music, calls) if it affects you.
- A change of scenery (different desk, café, meeting room) can sometimes reset overwhelm.
- It's okay to leave your desk briefly to regulate; you don't need to explain every break.

Want to Know More?

- See our companion guide: “Workplace ND Audit Checklist” if you'd like to push for broader environmental changes.
- See our guide “Examples of Adjustments” for more formal requests around sensory environment.

Before You Go

Needing strategies to manage a busy environment doesn't mean you're not capable; it means the environment wasn't built with you in mind.

Small daily strategies add up to real, meaningful relief over time.