

Neurodiversity Awareness for the Workplace

Study Guide Transcript



Spring 2025

*This study guide transcript has been provided to support learners in following the **Way2Learn Neurodiversity Awareness for the Workplace** course.*

*While the guide serves as a useful resource, we highly recommend that learners watch the course episodes on the **Way2Learn channel** or via the **Video-on-Demand** service to gain a full understanding before completing the answer book.*

*For your convenience, episode times are listed on **page 4 of the answer book**, within the **Way2Learn prospectus** in your library, and in the **quick-glance guide**.*

Episode 1: Understanding Neurodiversity



Tutor:

Welcome to Neurodiversity Awareness for the Workplace. This course is designed to help you understand the strengths and challenges of neurodivergent individuals and how workplaces can better support and include everyone.

Whether you're preparing for employment, looking to sustain a role, or simply keen to learn more, this course will help you build awareness and confidence in a professional setting.

In this first episode, we'll introduce what neurodiversity means and why understanding it is so important in the workplace. You will learn about key neurodivergent profiles, explore how neurodiversity might display in work-related tasks like problem-solving and teamwork, and tackle some common misconceptions. By the end of this episode, you'll be able to identify key characteristics of neurodiversity and recognise the range of conditions that may impact the workplace.

To help us explore this topic, we'll hear from Sarah, our neurodiversity expert, who will share her insights and examples to bring this subject to life. So, to help us understand what neurodiversity means, here's Sarah.

Understanding Neurodiversity

Sarah:

Neurodiversity refers to the way our brains process and interpret information differently from what society typically expects. Examples of neurodiversity include conditions such as dyslexia, autism, and ADHD, which are some of the most common ones we encounter.

In a workplace setting, these differences might present themselves in terms of challenges within the environment, but they also come with unique strengths. For example, an individual with dyslexia may find tasks involving extensive writing or large

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amounts of text and data processing difficult. On the other hand, they may excel in creative problem-solving tasks.

An individual with autism might struggle with social communication, particularly two-way reciprocal conversations and interpreting social cues. However, they often have a high level of attention to detail, which can be incredibly valuable in certain roles.

Neurodivergent Strengths in Problem-Solving and Teamwork

Sarah:

Problem-solving and teamwork are two key skills required in a range of jobs. An individual with ADHD, for instance, might excel at multitasking and engaging with various individuals to collect information. However, they may struggle with impulsivity and knowing when to stop, especially during tasks like surveys or evidence gathering. Providing clear boundaries and guidelines can be very beneficial in these situations.

For someone with autism, engaging in social communication or interpreting non-verbal cues, such as facial expressions and gestures, can be difficult. However, their attention to detail can be a significant asset when it comes to tasks like collating survey responses or working on highly detailed projects. Therefore, making appropriate adjustments is crucial to enable them to thrive in these tasks.

Recognising Individual Needs

Sarah:

It's essential for neurodivergent individuals to understand their own profile of strengths and challenges. Often, there's a lack of understanding about their diagnosis, but being aware of what they do well and where they may need support is critical.

In high-pressure environments, like call centres, which involve constant social communication, individuals with autism may face significant challenges due to sensory and communication demands. Without proper adjustments, such environments may not be ideal for them. Identifying the right role that aligns with their strengths is key to ensuring success and job satisfaction.

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Summary

Tutor:

In this episode, we explored the strengths neurodivergent individuals can bring to the workplace, as well as the challenges they might face. We discussed effective coping strategies, such as breaking tasks into smaller steps, using organisational tools, and creating supportive environments. Recognising these strengths and challenges is crucial for building confidence and achieving success in employment.

In the next episode, we'll look at how workplaces can promote inclusivity, including legal responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 and practical steps to support neurodivergent employees.

Thanks for joining us, and we'll see you next time.

Episode 2: Strengths, Challenges and Coping Strategies



Tutor:

Welcome back to Neurodiversity Awareness for the Workplace. In our last episode, we explored what neurodiversity means and why it's important to recognise it in professional environments.

In this episode, we'll focus on understanding the common strengths and challenges neurodivergent individuals may experience at work. You'll learn how sensory sensitivities, communication styles, or differences in processing information can influence performance. More importantly, we'll discover strategies that can help overcome these challenges.

By the end of this episode, you'll be able to recognise the strengths and challenges of neurodivergent individuals and explore effective workplace coping strategies that can lead to success. Once again, Sarah will share her expert knowledge and provide real-world examples to give us a deeper understanding.

Sensory Sensitivities and Workplace Adjustments

Sarah:

There are a range of challenges that neurodivergent individuals might face. One common challenge for individuals with autism is sensory sensitivity. This could involve difficulties with loud or bright environments, such as noisy workplaces, busy cafés, or restaurants with harsh lighting.

Bright lights, for example, can be physically painful for some individuals. In noisy environments, it can be difficult for them to filter out background noise and focus on a conversation with a customer. Providing noise-cancelling headphones or creating quiet workspaces are straightforward adjustments that can make a big difference.

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Another effective adjustment is altering where someone works within the office. For instance, if they are seated under a bright fluorescent light, repositioning their desk to reduce the impact of the light can be helpful. These small changes might seem minor, but they can have a significant impact on the well-being and productivity of neurodivergent employees.

Disclosing Needs in the Workplace

Sarah:

When it comes to disclosing neurodivergent needs, personal preference plays a significant role. Some individuals may choose to disclose their needs during the recruitment process, while others might wait until they start their role and develop a trusting relationship with their line manager.

It's important for employers to foster an inclusive environment where employees feel comfortable opening up about their needs. Managers should encourage open dialogue and create a supportive atmosphere. This can help individuals feel confident about disclosing their needs and seeking appropriate adjustments.

Coping Strategies and Support

Sarah:

If someone struggles with tasks like writing formal reports, which is common for individuals with dyslexia, providing a pro forma or checklist can be a simple yet effective solution. This helps them organise their thoughts and ensures that key elements are included in the report. Additionally, having someone proofread their work before submission can offer reassurance and improve the quality of the output.

Another useful strategy for employees with autism who experience communication challenges in meetings is to provide an agenda or discussion points beforehand. This allows them to prepare their thoughts in advance and reduces the pressure of having to come up with ideas on the spot. For many, this preparation can make a significant difference in their ability to contribute effectively.

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Summary

Tutor:

In this episode, we explored common workplace challenges, such as sensory sensitivities and communication difficulties. We also discussed effective coping strategies, including workplace adjustments like noise-cancelling headphones, providing checklists for tasks, and offering meeting agendas in advance.

Recognising and supporting the unique needs of neurodivergent individuals is essential to creating an inclusive work environment where everyone can thrive. In the next episode, we'll delve into building inclusive workplaces, focusing on practical steps employers can take and their legal responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010.

Thanks for joining us, and we'll see you next time.

Episode 3: Building Inclusive Workplaces



Tutor:

Welcome back to Neurodiversity Awareness for the Workplace. In our last episode, we explored common strengths and challenges faced by neurodivergent individuals and strategies to overcome these in professional settings.

In this episode, we'll focus on how workplaces can promote inclusivity by understanding the legal responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. We'll also look at practical steps employers can take to create a supportive environment where neurodivergent employees can thrive.

By the end of this episode, you'll have a better understanding of inclusive practices and how they benefit both employees and organisations. As always, Sarah will be sharing her expert insights to bring these concepts to life.

Common Workplace Challenges and Adjustments

Sarah:

One of the primary issues we often see with neurodivergent individuals is sensory sensitivity. Loud environments, bright lights, or busy workspaces can make it difficult for them to concentrate or feel comfortable. Adjustments, such as providing noise-cancelling headphones or creating quiet spaces, are simple but can have a huge impact.

Another useful adjustment is changing the physical environment. For example, if someone is seated under a bright fluorescent light, moving them to a less exposed area can significantly improve their comfort. These seemingly small changes can make a big difference to someone's ability to work effectively.

For employees who find it difficult to write formal reports, especially those with dyslexia, providing a structured pro forma or checklist can be beneficial. This ensures they have a

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clear guide on what to include in their report. Additionally, having a colleague proofread the final document can help boost their confidence and improve the overall quality of their work.

Communication Challenges in the Workplace

Sarah:

Communication challenges are another area that may affect neurodivergent individuals, especially in meetings. The fast-paced nature of meetings, with people talking over one another or rapid topic changes, can be overwhelming.

One way to support these employees is to provide an overview or agenda before the meeting, highlighting key topics of discussion. This allows them to prepare in advance and reduces the pressure of having to respond spontaneously. This simple step can make meetings far more inclusive and effective for everyone involved.

The Importance of Understanding Strengths and Challenges

Sarah:

It's really important for neurodivergent individuals to understand their own profile—their strengths as well as the areas they might find challenging. Many people I speak to aren't fully aware of their diagnosis or how it affects them at work.

When preparing for an interview, it's crucial for candidates to recognise and articulate both their strengths and their needs. They should think about which aspects of a job might be difficult and how adjustments can help them succeed. This self-awareness helps them feel more confident and gives employers a clearer idea of how to provide support.

When to Disclose Needs

Sarah:

Deciding when to disclose a neurodivergent condition is a personal decision. Some individuals feel comfortable disclosing their needs during the interview process, while others prefer to wait until they've started the job and built a rapport with their manager.

It's important for employers to create an environment where employees feel safe discussing their needs at any stage. This fosters trust and ensures that appropriate adjustments can be made in a timely manner.

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Summary

Tutor:

In this episode, we discussed the importance of creating inclusive work environments. We explored how small adjustments, such as changing physical workspace settings or providing meeting agendas in advance, can greatly improve the working experience for neurodivergent employees.

We also emphasised the need for employers to foster open communication and create a supportive environment where employees feel comfortable discussing their needs. Finally, we touched on legal responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010, which requires employers to make reasonable adjustments to support neurodivergent individuals.

Thanks for joining us. We hope this episode has provided valuable insights. We'll see you next time!

Episode 4: Neurodiversity in Prisons



Tutor: Hello, and welcome to this very special programme on Way Out TV about neurodiversity in prisons. We're here in the C3 studios in Cambridge. I'm Lucy, and I'm joined by my colleagues Fabian and Pippa, both of whom have lived experience of neurodiversity in the criminal justice system. So, hello to you both.

Fabian: Hello.

Tutor: Fabian, neurodiversity—it's a fairly new word and perhaps sounds quite complex. What does it mean to you?

Fabian: Well, you're right. I hadn't heard of the term until a couple of years ago. I have a diagnosis of adult attention deficit disorder and a form of dyslexia. My understanding is that neurodiversity includes a range of conditions like mine, such as ADD, dyslexia, Tourette's, Asperger's, or autism spectrum disorder. Essentially, it means thinking differently.

Tutor: Pippa, would you like to add anything?

Pippa: Yes, I think it's only recently that neurodiversity, as an umbrella term, has come into the spotlight. Many people wouldn't necessarily know they have these traits. It's only through open conversations and learning about themselves that they realise, "Oh, that's why I've been struggling throughout my life."

Neurodiversity in the Prison Environment

Tutor: This discussion is specifically about prisons. Why do you think it's important to talk about neurodiversity in that context?

Pippa: Quite a lot of people in prison struggle with mental health, well-being, or changes in the prison environment. They might not be aware that they have neurodiversity or know what it means. They may not even know who to talk to or how to get help. It can be anything from feeling overwhelmed by noise on the landings or in their cells to struggling to cope in certain situations.

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Fabian: Yes, and another key point is that neurodiversity might even be one of the reasons a person ends up in prison. As a child, I was very hyperactive. Unfortunately, my parent's response was to punish me physically, thinking it would make me stop. This caused a lot of trauma at home. I grew up feeling different, and that's not a great feeling when you're trying to fit in at school. I was impulsive and often spoke without thinking.

Tutor: How did that affect your education?

Fabian: It got me expelled from two primary schools, a secondary school, and college, all for the same reasons—impulsivity. I never felt like I fitted in. As I grew older, I became isolated, and eventually, I developed a serious addiction. I was self-medicating, which played a big part in why I ended up in prison.

Pippa: That's a similar experience to mine. Growing up, I also felt different. At school, some teachers would just send me away. A few even locked me in cupboards or put me under their desks. That was traumatic and has left me with claustrophobia.

Fabian: Once I was in prison, I realised how many triggers there were in the environment—especially the noise. For someone with ADD, it's hard to focus on one conversation when there's another one happening nearby. In my cell, the sound was contained, but as soon as I stepped out onto the landing, the noise was overwhelming. Doors slamming, people shouting, conversations echoing—it was like being in a cavern.

Challenges in Education and Asking for Help

Tutor: What about education in prisons? How do neurodivergent individuals cope with it?

Pippa: If someone has neurodiversity, it can feel like a learning disability, even though it's actually a learning difficulty. Many people are reluctant to ask for help because of pride or fear of appearing vulnerable. They might struggle to read or focus on a page because the words seem too close together, and that can be overwhelming. Asking for help can feel like admitting weakness, which is hard for many.

Fabian: Exactly. Growing up, I often wore a mask to hide how I was feeling or what I couldn't do. In prison, that continues—people don't always ask for help because it makes them feel exposed.

Support Available in Prisons

Tutor: After the break, we'll be joined by Sarah Jones, head of neurodiversity and functional skills at People Plus. She'll explain what help is available for those who might relate to this discussion. Stay with us.

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Tutor: Welcome back to this special programme on neurodiversity in prisons. We're now joined by Sarah Jones, head of neurodiversity and functional skills in prison education at People Plus. Thank you for being here, Sarah.

Sarah: Hi, thank you for having me.

Tutor: What does the term neurodiversity mean?

Sarah: Neurodiversity is a relatively new term that refers to how our brains process and interpret information differently. We often hear the term “neurotypical,” which describes people whose brains process information in a way that society expects. Neurodiverse individuals process information differently, and this can include conditions like autism, dyslexia, dyscalculia, and dyspraxia.

How to Access Support in Prison

Tutor: If someone in prison thinks they need help with a neurodiverse condition, what should they do?

Sarah: The first step is to talk to your keyworker on the wing. They can advise you on what to do next. Often, they'll suggest submitting an application to the healthcare team. Each prison has neurodiversity or disability specialists who can provide support.

Additionally, many prisons now have neurodiversity support managers, who work outside of education and healthcare in areas like the wings and workshops. Their role is to support individuals with neurodiverse needs throughout the prison environment.

Why Seeking Help Matters

Tutor: Why is it so important for people to seek help?

Sarah: It's vital not to suffer in silence. Too often, discussions about neurodiversity focus on the negatives—what people can't do. It's essential to shift the focus to the strengths that come with neurodiverse profiles. Recognising those strengths can make a huge difference.

Tutor: Thank you, Sarah. That's been incredibly helpful.

Tutor: Fabian, Pippa—what would you like to say to viewers who might be thinking, “This sounds like me”?

Fabian: First of all, there's nothing wrong with being different. When I was in an open prison, I spoke to a nurse who understood neurodiversity and helped me. I'd say, talk to a healthcare professional, find out who the lead is in your prison, and keep asking until you get the help you need. Don't give up.

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Pippa: I completely agree. It's also important to talk to others—both staff and peers. Open conversations help build confidence, and talking to people with lived experience can be really valuable.

Tutor: Thank you both for sharing your experiences. And thank you to everyone watching this special programme on neurodiversity in prisons.

