



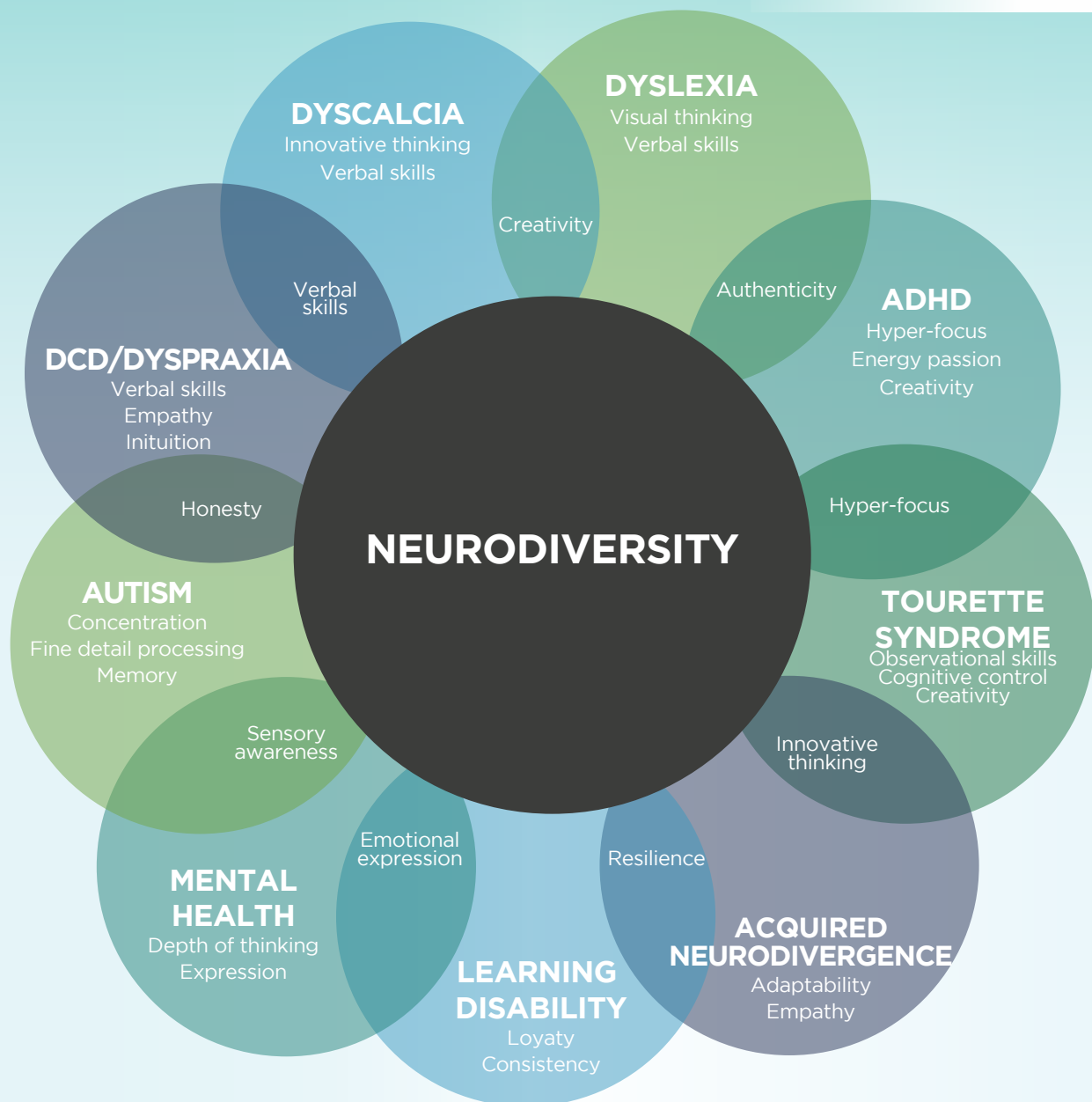
Defining Neurodiversity and Neurodivergence

Neurodiversity describes the natural way that people think, learn, perceive the world, interact, and process information differently. Different ways of thinking, learning, perceiving the world, and interacting with others helps organisations thrive, as a workforce that includes people with a variety of perspectives, backgrounds and experiences can improve creativity, innovation and problem solving.

Neurodivergent people include autistic people; people with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other mental health conditions; and people with learning disabilities. This group also includes people with other intellectual and developmental disabilities and a wide range of conditions that can shape thinking, learning, and perceiving the world. In contrast, people whose brains and nervous systems function “typically” are known as neurotypical people. A workplace that supports all types of ways to think, learn, interact, and perceive the world supports neurodiversity.

No two neurodivergent people are exactly alike. Thus, each neurodivergent person will bring a different set of skills and talents to the workplace and have different access and support needs.





Here are some strategies to enhance your and your organisation's support for neurodivergent teammates:

Avoid stereotyping and assumptions

Neurodiversity encompasses a broad spectrum of neurological differences. Every neurodivergent individual possesses unique capabilities and challenges. Stereotyping or making assumptions about their abilities based on their neurodivergent status can be misleading and harmful. Respect individuality, recognising that a diagnosis doesn't define their competencies or potential to contribute effectively to their role.

Promote clear and understandable communication

Communication is a cornerstone of effective collaboration. Ensure your language is clear, straightforward, and devoid of unnecessary jargon or metaphors, which can sometimes cause confusion. This not only fosters understanding for neurodivergent individuals, but it also aids overall team communication, making interactions more effective and productive.

Incorporate structure and routine

Many neurodivergent individuals find comfort in structure and predictability. Consider introducing routine and structure into your team engagements. This could be a consistent meeting schedule, regular check-ins, or project management tools to organise tasks clearly. Process consistency can reduce anxiety, improve performance, and contribute to a more inclusive environment.

Encourage communication preference disclosure

People have varying communication preferences. Encourage your team members to share how they prefer to communicate via email, instant messaging, phone calls, or face-to-face conversations. Empower neurodivergent individuals to express their preferred communication channels and methods and endeavor to adapt accordingly. This approach enhances mutual understanding and collaboration.

Cultivate empathy for social interactions

Social situations can sometimes be challenging for neurodivergent individuals, potentially leading to misunderstandings. Educate your team on the nuances of neurodivergence to promote empathy and understanding. If a team member inadvertently says something perceived as rude or inappropriate, guide the team to respond with kindness and compassion.

Respect non-verbal communication preferences

Eye contact, a common non-verbal communication, can be uncomfortable for some neurodivergent individuals. If a team member avoids eye contact, demonstrate respect by following their lead. This kind of adaptability makes the individual comfortable and signals respect for their personal preferences.



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What are some things I can do to support someone who is neurodivergent?

There are many things people can do to be supportive of neurodivergent individuals. Some of the most important things you should keep in mind include:

- 1. Listen.** People who are neurodivergent may feel misunderstood or left out. Be willing to listen to them. Let them know you hear them and respect them and their choices.
- 2. Communicate in ways that help them.** Sometimes, people who are neurodivergent prefer written communication such as instant messaging, texting or emails over a phone call or face-to-face conversation. Give them the time and tools they need to communicate.
- 3. Avoid value-based labels.** Experts recommend against using the terms “high-functioning” and “low-functioning” to describe conditions like autism. They often assume a person’s level of function based on how much they behave like someone who’s neurotypical.
- 4. No two neurodivergent people are the same.** The personalities and preferences of neurodivergent people can be widely different, even when they have the same underlying condition.
- 5. Don’t assume that anyone is incapable or unintelligent.** People who are neurodivergent often have conditions or preferences that make them stand out or appear different.
- 6. Treat everyone with respect.** You can “normalise” and provide others with accommodations in a way that honours their human dignity.



If you can identify with neurodiversity and struggle to manage within the work environment or even in your personal life, do not hesitate to seek assistance through the EAP Programme. EAP Counsellors (010 133 0525) are available 24 hours per day, 7 days per week to offer counselling and support. Alternatively, you are welcome to contact Platinum Health’s Mental Health Services (014 590 1700 or 080 000 6942).



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