



The manager's mini guide to supporting neurodivergent colleagues

Neurodivergence in the workplace isn't a problem to fix - it's a strength to embrace.

From ADHD and autism to dyslexia and dyspraxia, everyone's experience is different. Managers don't need to diagnose or solve - their role is to listen, adapt, and create an environment where people feel valued and supported.

Why it matters: opportunity, not obstacle

Neurodiversity and mental health are closely linked at work. When people don't feel understood or supported, stress rises and confidence drops.

When managers build support into everyday practice, it shifts the narrative: neurodivergence becomes a source of creativity, problem-solving and resilience - not a barrier.

Spot the signals

Every individual is different. But there are common behaviours that might indicate someone could benefit from additional support:

→ **Distraction**

Struggles to stay on task or frequently loses items.

→ **Avoidance**

Avoids presenting, networking or certain tasks that cause anxiety.

→ **Overwhelm**

Shuts down, becomes defensive, or shows visible stress.

As Natalie Ellis, Managing Director at Rebox HR and Breathe Partner, reminds us:



"If you've met one person with autism, you've met one person with autism. It's very individual - you won't meet two people with the same needs."

Watch the full webinar:

[Understanding mental health in HR and employment law](#)

The key is curiosity, not assumption.

Support, don't self-diagnose

Managers should never try to "label" behaviour. Instead, focus on support:

- Ask open questions: "What makes work easier for you?"
- Normalise adjustments, whether or not a diagnosis is shared.
- Use occupational health as your evidence-based partner.

You might spot traits - but the point is to offer support regardless of whether they have a disability or not. You'll never be on the wrong side of things if you start by being open and inclusive.

Reasonable adjustments made simple

You don't have to guess. There are excellent resources to guide you:

➔ **ADHD UK reasonable adjustments list - from flexible deadlines to written instructions.**

Neurodivergence doesn't mean every task is a struggle - often, small tweaks make the biggest difference. ADHD UK have published an excellent set of suggested workplace adjustments you can draw from. Examples include:

Flexible deadlines or staggered tasks	➔	Break projects into smaller steps to reduce overwhelm.
Written instructions and reminders	➔	Support memory and focus by following up conversations with a short email or checklist.
Quiet spaces or reduced interruptions	➔	Help concentration and reduce distractibility.
Clear prioritisation	➔	Regular check-ins to confirm what's urgent vs. what can wait.

Explore the full list here: [ADHD UK – Reasonable Adjustments](#)

➔ **Access to Work (GOV.UK) - funding for practical aids like noise-cancelling headphones, partitions, or software.**

The UK Government's **Access to Work** scheme provides funding for workplace adjustments that might otherwise feel out of reach for SMEs. Eligible employees can self-refer, but as a manager you can highlight this option to show your support. Adjustments can include:

Noise-cancelling headphones or partitions	➔	To minimise sensory overload in open-plan offices.
Specialist software or assistive tech	➔	For focus, planning, or text-to-speech support.
Travel or job coaching support	➔	Where relevant to the role.

Guidance and application details: [Access to Work](#)

➔ **Regular reviews - adjustments aren't one-off; check in and adapt.**

Support isn't "set and forget." What works at first might need tweaking over time. Build review points into your normal management rhythm:

Check in at 1:1s → "Are these adjustments still working for you?"

Log agreements in Breathe's performance tools → So you have a record of what's in place.

Adapt as roles or responsibilities change → e.g. a move to hybrid working may require new tools.

Stay flexible → Some adjustments may be temporary; others might be long-term.

As Natalie explains: *"The mistake is assuming what people need and spending thousands on the wrong adjustments. Always seek medical or occupational health advice first, so support is right for the individual."*



Looking for more HR advice? Reach out to our [Breathe Partner network](#).



Case example: reframing resistance

One manager faced repeated pushback to a new process and assumed it was stubbornness. In reality, the employee was fearful that change would expose mistakes.

By pausing and asking, “What’s worrying you about this change?” the manager reframed the situation with empathy. **The result?** The employee felt heard, became more open - and eventually championed the change.

Traits aren’t excuses. But when you listen first, you get to the real issue - and that’s where progress starts.

Quick wins and checklist for managers

Today, you can:

- ☐ **Ask, don’t assume:** “What support would help you most?”
- ☐ **Normalise adjustments:** small tweaks often make the biggest difference.
- ☐ **Use your resources:** OH, ADHD UK, Access to Work, stress risk assessments.
- ☐ **Review regularly:** check in, adapt, and keep the conversation open.



Remember: You’re not a clinician. You’re a line manager creating space for people to succeed. When you approach neurodivergence as an opportunity, you protect your business and unlock hidden talent.

Next steps

Record supportive 1:1s and adjustments in Breathe.

Capture what helps each person work at their best, and review it over time - so support is consistent for everyone.



Performance management with Breathe