



Information guide to
making neurodiverse
friendly adaptations
in educational and
professional settings

2024

In this leaflet you will find information about

- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).
- Autism (ASC).
- How these can affect an individual, their workplace and education.
- The definition and meaning of “reasonable adjustments”.
- How to meet the individual’s needs.
- Reviewing what works for the individual individual.



ADHD and ASC – common challenges for adults

ATTENTION DEFICIT HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER (ADHD)

ADHD is usually first diagnosed in childhood and often lasts into adulthood. You may not have been diagnosed as a child but may now be experiencing something that you recognise as ADHD behaviour. It may be that you are not thriving or reaching your potential because of the difficulties caused by your symptoms. There are three different types of ADHD, depending on which types of symptoms are strongest in the individual:

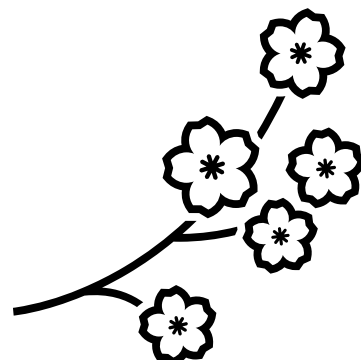
1. Predominantly Inattentive Presentation.
 2. Predominantly Hyperactive-Impulsive Presentation.
 3. Combined presentation.
- ADHD can cause challenges at work, at home, or in relationships. These challenges can include difficulty in maintaining attention, feeling disorganised, forgetful, difficulty in making decisions, memory problems, daydreaming, being told off for interrupting others, or impulsivity, difficulty in managing anger and frustrations, and poor sleep, among others.
 - Experience disrupted sleep.
 - Procrastinate.
 - Act impulsively.
 - Make careless mistakes.
 - Take excessive risks.
 - Experience restlessness.

Autism (ASC)

Autism Spectrum Conditions (ASC) is a term used to cover what were previously a wide range of conditions which shared common areas of difficulty, including Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Asperger's. ASC exists along a range or "spectrum" with some individuals experiencing more severe difficulties than others.

The common challenges for autistic people fall into three categories: Social relationships, communication skills, and understanding emotions.

- An autistic person may find it hard to "read" the room, feel highly anxious in social settings, find it difficult to make and maintain friendships, struggle with changes to the routine, struggle to identify and express feelings, among others. Difficulty in expressing how they feel.
- Sensory sensitivity, rigidity in behaviour.



Definition of “reasonable adjustments”.

According to the Equality Act 2010, employers and school has a duty to make reasonable adjustments to create an enabling environment in support of different abilities. This applies to all workers, including trainees, apprentices, contract workers and business partners.

Examples of reasonable adjustments:

- offering someone with social anxiety to have their own desk instead of hot-desking.
- making physical changes to the workplace, like installing a ramp for a wheelchair user or an audio-visual fire alarm for a hearing-impaired person.
- providing a special keyboard for an employee who has tendonitis.
- offering phased return to work, flexible hours of working etc
- offering employees training opportunities, recreation and refreshment facilities.

Source:

- <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/law-and-courts/discrimination/check-what-type-of-discrimination-youve-experienced/duty-to-make-reasonable-adjustments-for-disabled-people/>
- <https://www.gov.uk/reasonable-adjustments-for-disabled-workers>

6 top tips for employers/institutions

1. Be flexible and understanding.
2. Work in collaboration with your neurodiverse employee
3. Ask and listen to what reasonable adjustments they might need – small manageable changes might make a difference to their effectiveness and ability to work.
4. Use communication tools to support effective communication.
5. Be aware of how the environment might overwhelm a neurodiverse person, ask them how it affects them and work with them to develop a way to support them.
6. Arrange neurodiversity awareness training for staff to promote greater understanding and enable greater support.

ADHD - help in the workplace.

- Environmental modifications: Environmental modifications are changes that are made to the physical environment in order to minimise the impact of a person's ADHD on their day-to-day life. Each person's needs should be individually assessed and adapted to the person in question. Common modifications may include:
 - Changes to seating arrangements.
 - Working from home a few days a week
 - Changes to lighting and noise.
 - Reducing distractions.
 - Optimising work by offering shorter periods of focus with movement breaks.
 - Reinforcing verbal requests with written instructions.

- Assistive technology: The following technology may be helpful for individuals with ADHD to aid in their every-day life:
 - Voice recognition software.
 - Spell-checking and proofreading apps.
 - Apps that organise and prioritise ideas or activities.
 - Project management apps.
 - Timers, for employees who are easily distracted and may lose track of time.
 - Noise-cancelling headphones.
 - Changes to monitor settings.
 - Reading pens.

- Structure and organisation: Clear rules and advanced planning are keys to success for people with ADHD as many people with ADHD have significant difficulties with organisation. The following organisational supports are particularly useful.
 - Checklists are helpful to identify categories of items needed for assignments and commitments.
 - Start using a planner/diary might help structure people's day-to-day. By writing down commitments, using key words and bookmarks, it can help the individual develop a structure to their every-day-life and in the long-term, assist them in developing independence and confidence.
 - People with ADHD might work better when there is a clear start to finish plan. However, longer deadlines and unstructured activities can lead to procrastination. Using visual aids and collaboratively creating structure would enable the individual to take more responsibility. Practically, this can mean setting aside the same block of time each day for certain work tasks or assignments.
 - On longer-term projects, employees with ADHD may benefit from more frequent project reviews and feedback, focusing on positive progress to date and what further requirements are required before the next review.
 - The use of timers is helpful to indicate how much time remains before it's time to take a break or work on something else. The timer should be clearly visible so the individual can check remaining time and monitor their progress. You can also set alerts for themselves to remember to take breaks.
 - ADHD should be considered when tasks are allocated, with the aim of playing to the strengths of an employee with ADHD.

ADHD - help in the workplace continued.

- Store your important stationary items or tools in close proximity to you, preferably in the same place each day.
- Prioritise and mark your tasks in a manageable, realistic way to avoid feeling overwhelmed by workload. For example, you can mark tasks as “for today”, “for this week”, or mark them when the tasks are completed.
- Rewards: Rewards can be simple activities like having a tea break or walking around the block; any activity or item that can help the individual stay motivated.

- Responsibilities of the employer: As an employer, it is important that you seek further education about ADHD and how this can affect both your employee and your workplace. It is crucial that you are aware of your responsibilities and how you can adapt the working environment so that a person with ADHD can use their strengths. The following links can provide additional guidelines.
 - <https://dma.org.uk/uploads/misc/dma-talent-adhd-employer-guide-nm.pdf>
 - <https://www.adhdfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/An-Employers-Guide-to-ADHD-in-the-Workplace-Scottish-ADHD-Coalition-1.pdf>

ADHD - help in education.

- Environmental modifications: Environmental modifications are changes that are made to the physical environment in order to minimise the impact of a person's ADHD on their day-to-day life. Each person's needs should be individually assessed and adapted to the person in question. Common modifications may include;
 - Changes to seating arrangements.
 - Changes to lighting and noise.
 - Reducing distractions.
 - Optimising education to have shorter periods of focus with movement breaks.
 - Reinforcing verbal requests with written instructions.

- Classroom considerations: Factors that foster attention, positive behaviour, and academic and social success include establishing positive relationships with students, adopting classroom management techniques, and creating a physical arrangement that facilitates learning.
 - Time-out breaks: To help the student sustain their attention for prolonged periods of time, they would benefit from being able to take short breaks and have the option of leaving class when needed. It would therefore help if the individual could be seated close to the exits so that they easily can go outside without distracting peers.

Did you know?
It is estimated that
around 1 in 30 adults
has ADHD.

Source: Fayyad J, et al. Atten Defc
Hyperact Disord 2017;9(1):47-65.

- Planning and organisation: Clear rules and advanced planning are keys to success for teachers of students with ADHD as many students with ADHD have significant difficulties with organisation. The following organisational supports are particularly useful.
 - As students with ADHD struggles to organise work and notes, it would be helpful if tutors and teachers could prepare and distribute their hand-outs prior to the lessons. This way, the individual can better utilise their mental resources.
 - Provide a planning format and writing frames as well as prompt sheets to help develop planning and organisation skills for written tasks. Add structure to unstructured activities; sentence starters, defined spaces, fixed choices, checklists to break down tasks into manageable chunks and clear language around expectations can be helpful. The use of writing frames may help where key ideas are listed at the top of a page, and then inserted as either paragraph starters or key words (e.g., who/what/why/when/how and with what outcome), may be key questions that will help and ensure questions has been clearly answered and ideas are on paper.
 - Checklists that identify categories of items needed for assignments or areas to organise is beneficial. The checklist can be on a desk or the phone or where it is easily accessed.
 - Starting using a planner/diary to help implement structure in day-to-day life might be beneficial. By writing down commitments, using key words and bookmarks, it can help develop a structure to every-day-life and in the long-term, assist in developing independence and confidence.
 - The use of timers is helpful to indicate how much time remains before it's time to take a break or work on something else. The timer should be clearly visible so the individual can check remaining time and monitor their progress. You can also set alerts for themselves to remember to take breaks.
 - Examination timing: Provide students with extra time during exams so that they have enough time to put their thoughts and ideas on paper.

ADHD - help in education continued.

- Reading strategies: To use the individual's mental resources more efficiently, using active reading techniques can aid at college and at university. These involve reading headings before reading chapters, skimming chapters to see what comes next, taking notes while reading, making up questions using chapter headings, practicing answering these questions while reading, and reviewing major points. By structuring his reading, it might be easier to read and understand large amounts of hand-outs from teachers.
 - Bionic reading is a software that revises texts so that the most concise parts of words are highlighted.
 - The structure of polyrhythmic music is soothing to an ADHD brain struggling to regulate itself to stay on a linear path. Listening to this type of music can be helpful while learning new information. An example of this is here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sXC6AUbY69A&t=16766s>
- For teachers and academic institutions: Teachers and academic institutions would benefit from implementing strategies to support young people and adults with neurodevelopmental conditions.
 - <https://www.adhdfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Teaching-and-Managing-Students-with-ADHD.pdf>
 - <https://www.verywellmind.com/helping-children-with-adhd-20817>
- Resources:
 - Scattered Minds: The Origins and Healing of Attention Deficit Disorder by Dr Gabor Maté.
 - Driven to Distraction: Recognizing and Coping with Attention Deficit Disorder by M.D. Edward M. Hallowell and M.D. John J. Ratey.
 - ADHD foundation: <https://www.adhdfoundation.org.uk/>
 - ADHD UK: <https://adhduk.co.uk/>
 - CHADD: <https://chadd.org/>
 - Attention UK: <https://attentionuk.org/>

ASC - help in the workplace.

- Environmental modifications: Changes to the work environment can be particularly beneficial; environments at work can cause stress and as some autistic individuals are highly in tuned with sensory input, it can trigger overwhelm. Examples of environmental adjustments include:
 - Reducing noise and altering lighting.
 - Using a quiet, secluded part of the workplace to avoid noise and movement that can trigger sensory overload. Alternatively, a relaxation space (quiet room) can be put in place.
 - Ergonomic equipment such as keyboards, mice, trackpads and other tools like that can help to make an autistic employee feel more comfortable.
- Planning and organisation: Some autistic people dislike change of routine or unexpected changes. People have found the below helpful in these scenarios:
 - Using time management apps. These can help with scheduling tasks and finding out what is happening on the next day.
 - Ask for written instructions, for tasks to be broken down or clearly set out. This is also beneficial in terms of job descriptions so that the individual can feel confident in their work responsibilities and know what's expected of them.
 - Presentations that require the individual to ask questions could be shared in advance, so they can think about those questions and how best to respond.

ASC - help in the workplace continued.

- Prepare for changes: Below are a few recommendations on how to enable coping with anticipated change:
 - offer information in advance. Provide individual support where schedules are unavoidably disrupted and when changes are introduced.
 - When unexpected change does occur, allow the individual time to adjust. This can mean giving the employee the option of decompressing, or just sit and running through the new schedule in their own time.
- Managing and understanding social relationships:
 - By using instant messaging or text-to-teach apps, the autistic individual can find it easier to break down communication barriers, if they are not comfortable with using the phone or face-to-face communication.
 - Voluntary participation in meetings, meetings with clients, and social gatherings.
 - Workplace passports and one-page profiles can help individuals to build relationships and communication with others.

ASC - help in the workplace continued.

- Responsibilities of the employer: The following recommendations and links can provide additional guidelines.
 - Autism awareness training is most frequently identified as a beneficial adjustment to implement in the workplace, with the main reason being that this would enable the entire workforce to support autistic colleagues. A lack of understanding amongst colleagues may contribute to behaviour perceived as bullying. In addition to training, regular discussions between employees and employers about strengths, needs and possible support options are beneficial.
 - Reducing noise and altering lighting.
 - Offering tailored support, reassurance, and sensitive but direct feedback.
 - Clarify expectations of the job. An employer may need to be more explicit about the expectations for an autistic member of staff. As well as the job description, they might need to clarify the unwritten/unofficial rules of the workplace.
 - Flexible working (this can be important if/when employees are experiencing anxiety or stress as a result from sensory overload).
 - Autism Hampshire: <https://autismhampshire.org.uk/about-autism/making-workplaces-autism-friendly>

ASC - help in education

- Sensory difficulties: If an autistic pupil's sensory differences mean that they are struggling to navigate the sensory world of school, for example the classroom environment, crowded corridors and the playground, a school must make reasonable adjustments to help them not just cope, but also enjoy school and reach their full potential.
 - Implement quiet zones or a room where the pupil can go to relax and get away from busy or overwhelming environments.
 - Allowing the use of ear defenders or headphones to block out noises such as school bells, or the use of sunglasses or blackout blinds.
 - Ensuring classrooms are uncluttered with minimal décor and wall displays.
 - Allowing the pupil to 'stim' (self-stimulatory behaviour - rocking, spinning, hand/finger flapping).
 - Staggering the start/end of the day allowing the pupil to come into the institution building earlier, or later, than other pupils to avoid the noise and commotion of the corridors or entrances.

- Assistive technology: The following technology may be helpful for individuals with ASC to aid in their every-day life and to increase the chances of them utilizing their resources on their strengths instead of on areas of deficits.
 - Voice recognition software.
 - Spell-checking and proofreading apps.
 - Apps that organise and prioritise ideas or activities.
 - Timers, for students who are easily distracted and may lose track of time.
 - Noise-cancelling headphones.
 - Changes to monitor settings.
 - Reading pens.
 - Examination assistive technology during exams.

ASC - help in education

- Classroom considerations: Factors that foster attention, positive behaviour, and academic and social success include establishing positive relationships with students, adopting classroom management techniques, and creating a physical arrangement that facilitates learning.
 - Time-out breaks: To help the student sustain their attention for prolonged periods of time, they would benefit from being able to take short breaks and have the option of leaving class when needed. It would therefore help if the individual could be seated close to the exits so that they easily can go outside without distracting peers.

- Cognition and learning: Autistic pupils might have more difficulties in gaining basic literacy and numeracy skills or understanding concepts. Young people may need;
 - More practical activities.
 - Tasks set out in smaller steps.
 - Specific programmes to support development of literacy and numeracy skills, for example the Department of Education's Literacy and
 - numeracy catch-up strategies
(https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5b97bc1240f0b67866ffbd1c/literacy_and_numeracy_catch_up_strategies_amended_july-2018_amended_10.09.18.pdf)

Did you know?
Around 700,000
people have an
autism diagnosis in
the UK.

Source: National Autistic Society,
2023.

ASC - help in education continued.

- Responsibilities of the teacher and educational institutions: As teachers, it is crucial that you are aware of your responsibilities and how you can adapt the educational environment so that a person with ASC can use their strengths. The following recommendations and links can provide additional guidelines.
 - Autism awareness training is the most frequently identified beneficial adjustment to implement in institutions, with the main reason being that this would enable the entire workforce to support autistic pupils.
 - Reducing noise and altering lighting.
 - Offer tailored support, reassurance, and sensitive but direct feedback.
 - Clarify expectations of an assignment or task. A teacher may need to be more explicit about the expectations for an autistic student.
 - Autism Welcome Events: Events like these for neurodiverse students and their families is a great way for them to find out more about support services, tour the campus, learn more about university life and meet other students who might have similar needs.

- Resources

- National Autistic Society: www.autism.org.uk
- Neurodiversity week: <https://www.neurodiversityweek.com/>
- the Autism Education Trust <https://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/>
- The Curly Hair Project: The Curly Hair Project is an organisation that helps people on the autistic spectrum and the people around them, founded by autistic author Alis Rowe.
<https://thegirlwiththecurlyhair.co.uk/>
- The Youtube video 'Amazing things happen' which explains autism in a very positive and simple way.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RbwRrVw-CRo>
- The ASD Workbook: 'Understanding Your Autism Spectrum Disorder' by Penny Kershaw

Further references

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[leaflet]. <https://www.adhdandyou.co.uk/assets/pdf/adhd-employers-guide.pdf>