



# Neurodiversity Awareness Guide



Neurodiversity Community, December 2025



**“[...] managers have begun thinking more deeply about leveraging the talents of *all* employees [...].**

**It’s made me a better manager, without a doubt.”**



<https://hbr.org/2017/05/neurodiversity-as-a-competitive-advantage>  
(last retrieved June 26, 2025)

This presentation includes illustrations generated with the use of AI-powered creative tools.

# Foreword by Birgit Bohle

## Dear Readers,

Neurodiversity – while the term may initially seem abstract, it is in fact a key to greater understanding, more effective collaboration, and the unlocking of true strengths within teams.

We know that approximately 20 percent of people are neurodivergent. This makes it clear: Neurodiversity is already an integral part of our everyday working lives – in meetings, project teams, and decision-making processes. The real opportunity lies in shaping environments where everyone can contribute their unique strengths.

This Awareness Guide serves as a valuable source of inspiration. With thoughtfulness and clarity, it sheds light on the essence of neurodiversity and outlines what is needed to create an inclusive culture in which all individuals can thrive and realize their full potential.

As the sponsor of the Neurodiversity Community, I am deeply pleased to support this initiative. The better we understand and appreciate our differences, the more we can grow together – both as individuals and as an organization.

I wish you an insightful and inspiring read.

Warmest regards,

**Birgit Bohle**

Chief Human Resources and Legal Officer, Director of Labour Relations



# Neuro-what?! Why should I read this?

## **We know your time is valuable, so let us keep it brief.**

Do you care about building stronger teams, improving communication, and supporting your people in a way that truly makes a difference? If so, this document should be worth a closer look for you.

Estimated 20% of the world population are neurodivergent. So you are probably already now working together with neurodivergent peers, colleagues or managers.

**Understanding our differences supports better communication and successful teamwork, while being less effort for everybody.**

Estimated

# 20%

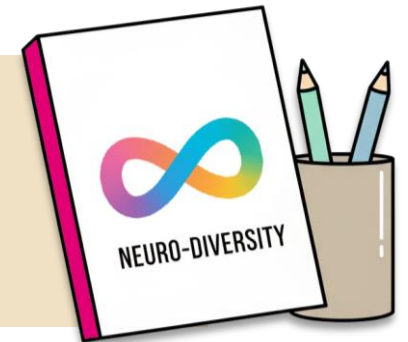
of the world population  
are neurodivergent

## **This is important for our company, too.**

Letting neurodivergent employees work in truly supporting working conditions will help to

- leverage your neurodivergent colleagues' full potential,
- increase your team performance,
- avoid cases of burnout or quiet quitting,
- serve our customers better.

We have put particular effort on avoiding busy pages and presenting the content with utmost ease for you. Where useful, we have added links to further resources and a small box with information to take away (like this one).



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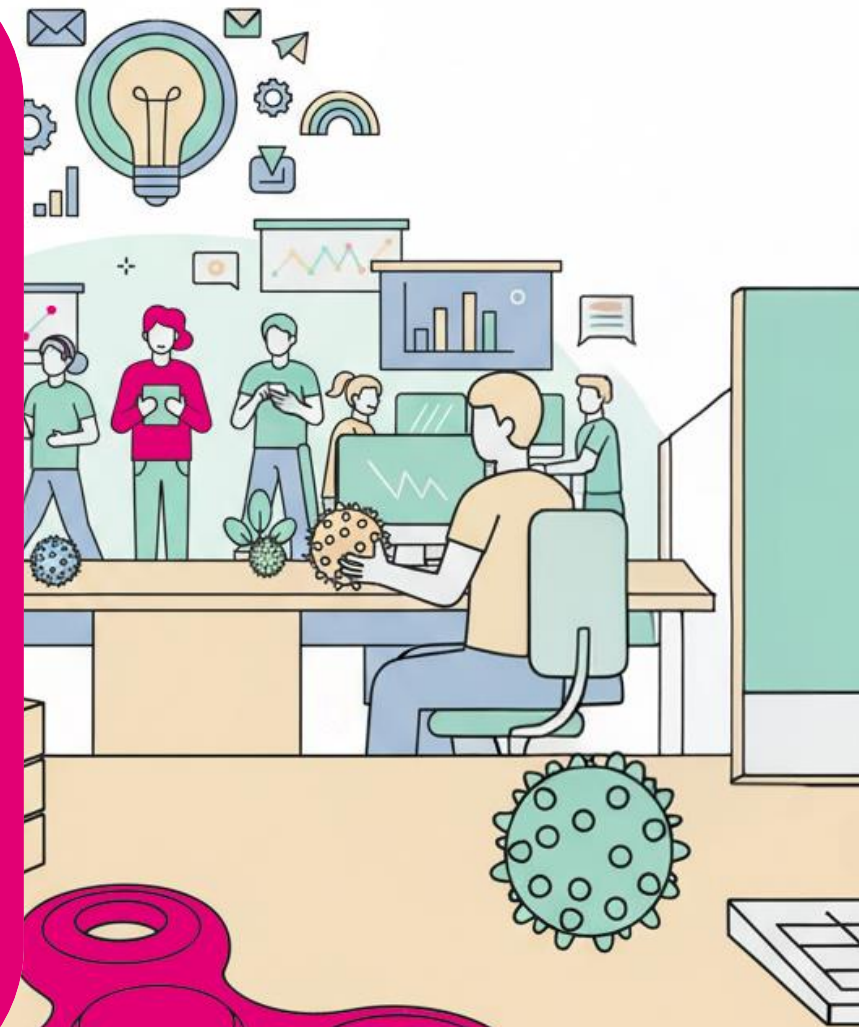
**5. How can I be supportive?**

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# Do you know someone like Jules?

**Jules is a nice person.** But why doesn't she join when you invite your team out after work into this hip pizza place? And the few times she joins, she **doesn't seem to enjoy** and engage in your lively **conversations**.

You also wanted to speak to Jules about her **always occupying the same desk**. We have a shared desk policy, and our management wants us to change places and mingle around in order to have more social contacts.

In meetings Jules often **fiddles with a pen** or any office accessories around instead of paying attention.

Jules is pretty smart though, and her **highly creative** solutions are really spot-on.

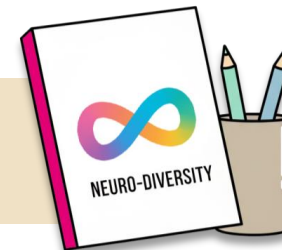
**Her ideas effectively help us** with our challenges and support our company strategies at the same time.

But her **always detailed questions** sometimes give you a hard time. How should you know ...?

And besides, the other team members also appear to feel annoyed and **blame her to be a know-it-all**.

Disregarding Jules social background, ethnicity, religion or sex, this behavior is different from our mainstream expectations at work. But it **is not necessarily intended or offensive**. One possible clue could be neurodiversity.

Colleagues that act differently than you expect, could do so without meaning it offensively. Be aware of an unconscious bias.



# Neurodiversi – what?

The term **neurodiversity** refers to natural variations of the human brain leading to different ways of processing stimuli and executing executive and neurocognitive functions. Neurodiversity is a paramount term used in several contexts. A concise overview on **medical** and **social** aspects, and on a **self advocacy** movement can be found e.g. on wikipedia.org:



<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neurodiversity>  
(licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0  
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-s/4.0/>,  
last retrieved on June 26, 2025)

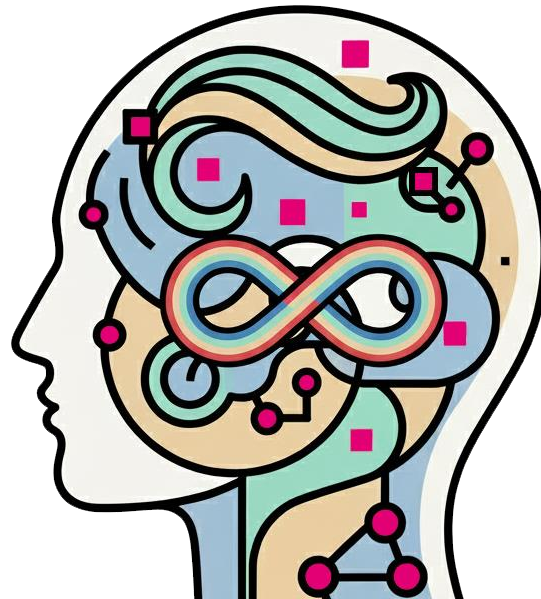
According to leading management consultancy companies neurodiversity is a **competitive advantage**, e.g.



<https://www.forbes.com/sites/dalearcher/2014/05/14/adhd-the-entrepreneurs-superpower/>  
(last retrieved on June 26, 2025)



<https://www.leadersedge.com/industry/beautiful-minds>  
(last retrieved on June 26, 2025)



**Deutsche Telekom supports neurodiversity as one aspect in the diversity dimension “physical and mental abilities”.**



We already have neurodivergent colleagues. Let us jointly enable them to perform at their best.



# Neurodiversity is broadly romanticised in media

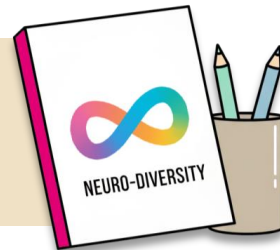
**Extremely gifted characters, savants or funny nerds dominate mainstream media coverage on neurodiversity. Here are some prominent examples:**

- 1980's movie „**Rain Man**“, inspired by the life of American savant Kim Peek,
- US-American sitcom „**The Big Bang Theory**“ featuring highly gifted and probably autistic physicist Sheldon Cooper and his friends,
- „**Human camera**“ Stephen Wiltshire, who is famous for his accurate and precise drawings of entire cities after having seen them only on a helicopter ride.
- Many YouTube posts often ridicule neurodivergent individuals.

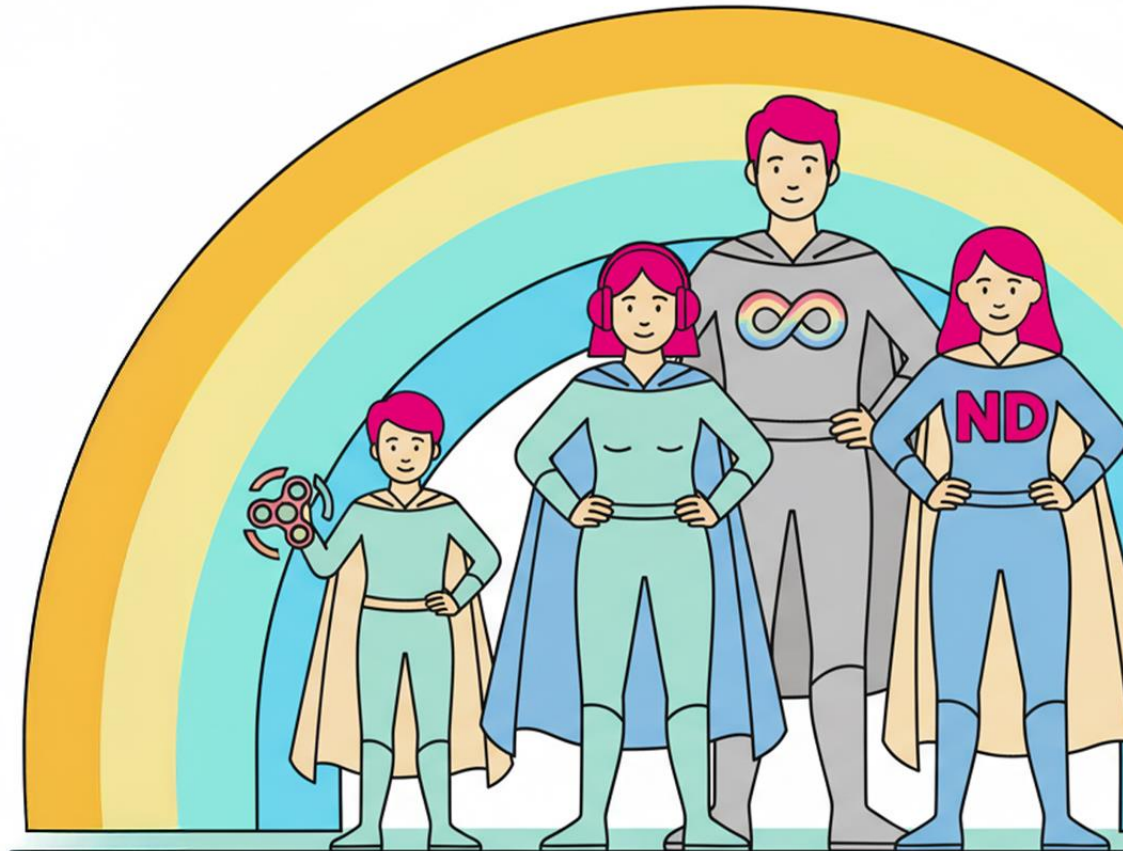
**There is a huge variety among neurodivergent individuals**, beyond just spectacularly capable savants and the quirky student living communities often portrayed.

Neurodivergent persons are working among us, many of them try to pretend to be neurotypical, as they feel expected to do.

Neurodivergent individuals don't necessarily look or act like Rain Man or Sheldon Cooper (from Big Bang Theory).



Neurodivergent individuals don't look like this – and they don't live like stereotypes.



# Neurodivergent means different – not impaired



**Different – not impaired. Neurodivergence itself is not visible and is not always a disability.**

Technical assistance devices for neurodivergent individuals are less obvious than e.g. a wheelchair or glasses.

**Two common ways of neurodivergent persons describing themselves are:**



Living on the wrong planet



Being differently wired

Both metaphors emphasize that neurodivergents are and feel sane and fully equipped to live their lives. But they also realize that they feel and act differently than the majority of their peers.

Neurodivergent individuals are not impaired and don't want to be treated as if they were. But they might require invisible assistance.

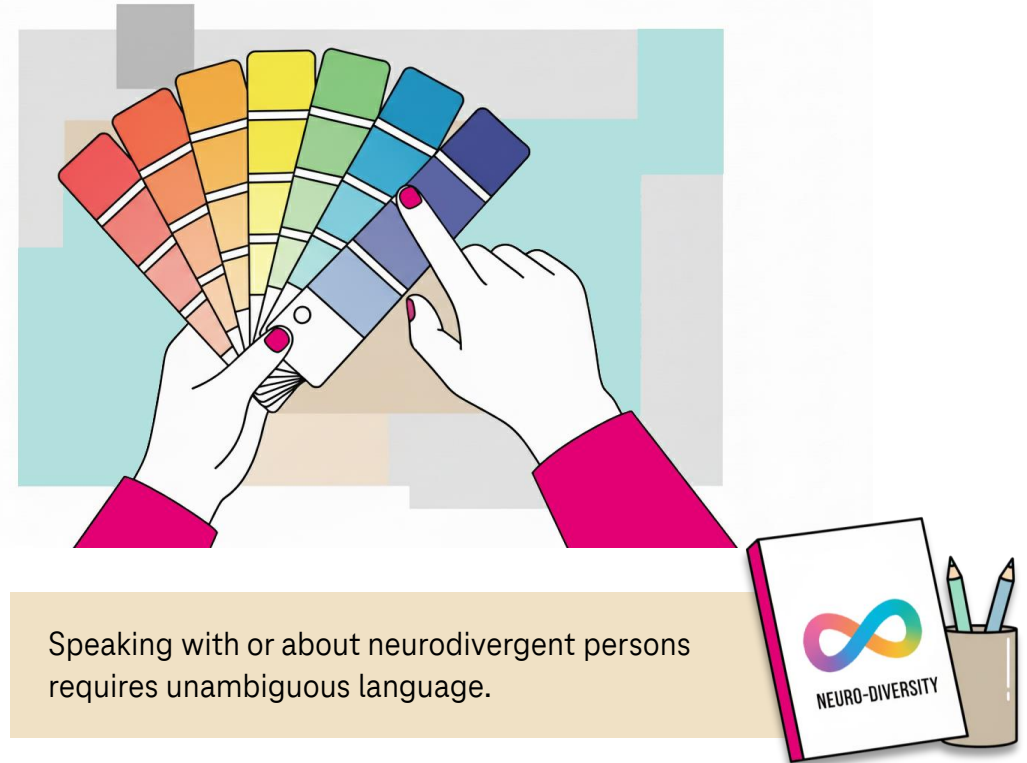


# Clear definitions required to avoid misunderstandings

## Neurodiversity is many-faceted. Let's start to get clarity by introducing some essential terms.

**Neurodiversity:** abbreviation of the neurodiversity paradigm

- **Neurotype:** type of neurocognitive profile („make up“\*), e.g. Autism, ADHD
- **Neuro-normative** (also **neurotypical**): persons who fall within the average range of functioning and thinking
- **Neurodivergent (ND):** person with one or multiple relevant neurotypes
- **Neurodiverse:** used to emphasize the full variety of neurotypes
- **Neurominority:** group of persons with the same specific neurotype(s)
- **Character traits** are independent from neurotypes. Despite existing narratives, character traits are not linked to neurotypes.
- **Masking:** coping mechanisms to compensate for differences between a neurodivergent individual's authentic and neurotypically expected behavior
- **Accommodations:** technical or organizational tools that help ND individuals to fulfill social or functional expectations



Speaking with or about neurodivergent persons requires unambiguous language.

\*) Language evolves over time. In the past, neurodivergent individuals had been diagnosed according to medical assessments that described deficiencies and limitations. These diagnoses have coined the way our societies perceive neurodiversity. Neurodivergent people have the interest to be called by their characteristics rather than by their limitations. We try to use neuro-affirmative language and to avoid medical terms like „disorder“ or „condition“, and use the term „neurocognitive make up“ instead.

# Neurodiversity matters



## Competitiveness

Neurodiversity is one diversity dimension. In order to attract customers and talents, we need to represent our society's diversity.

If we actively include minorities in our staff, we foster competitiveness by:

- Utilizing the talent we already have amongst us, e.g. by providing the environment where **all** employees can excel
- Attracting extraordinary talent by effective and inclusive recruiting processes
- Sustaining loyal talent because they feel supported and represented
- Gaining customer share from brands that don't represent those minorities
- Bringing in firsthand knowledge about specific minorities by employees belonging to the very same minority

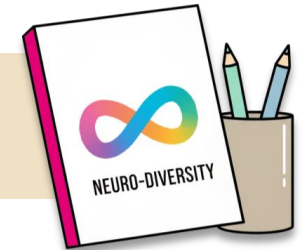


## Talent Management

Talent Management can help enable neurodivergent staff to realize their full potential:

- Neurodivergent applicants come with a high variety of neurological characteristics
- Neurodivergent staff can excel beyond typical career paths
- Providing suitable accommodations to neurodivergent staff can help to cope with specifics of their condition and stress, and makes them feel valued

Fostering neurodiversity in our staff is important for our business.



# Neurodiversity comes with high behavioural diversity

**“If you know one autistic person, you know (exactly) one autistic person.”**

is a famous saying that illustrates that neurodiversity brings diversity also within neurominorities. It is not possible to jointly describe all autistic people, or all persons with ADHD etc.

But neurominorities may share common sensitivities or behavioral patterns, e.g. they can display:

- Very high sensory sensitivity and sometimes even physically suffer from intense light, sound, smell or other sensory perceptions.
- Different communication styles, e.g. focusing on facts and contents instead of team affirmation by mutual flattering, or avoiding eye-contact. This may unintentionally appear rude sometimes.
- High focus on details, sometimes ignoring social context.
- Stimming in order to keep focus on a certain topic.



If you know one neurodivergent person,  
you know exactly one neurodivergent person.

NEURO-DIVERSITY

# Sensory perception testimonials

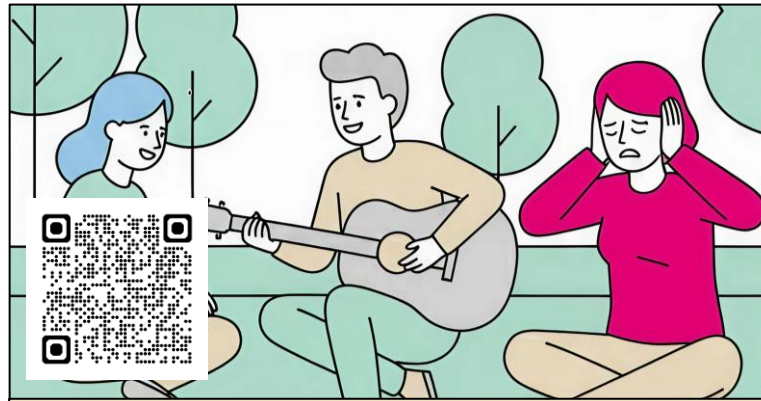
Here are some video picks for you that give an impression of how your neurodivergent team members may perceive everyday situations differently from what you expect:



## How can natural background noise be too exhausting?

Have look at Craig Thomsons video “What it's like to walk down a street when you have autism or an ASD”

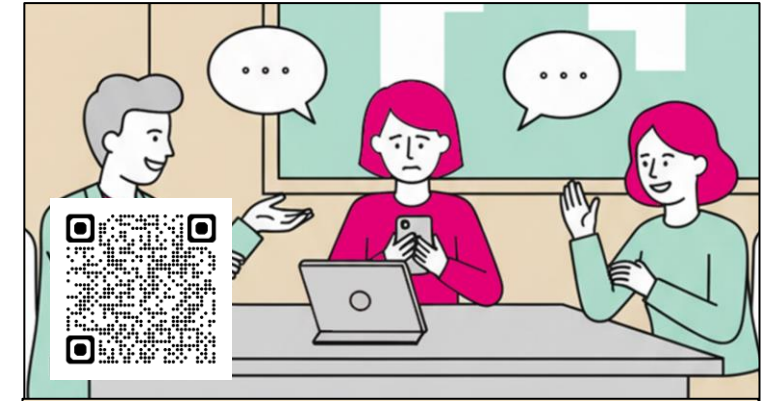
Click here to watch on YouTube\*:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=plPNhooUUuc>



## How can background noise in an outdoor environment make communication nearly impossible?

This is what Mark Rober shows with his very private blog post “The Truth About my Son”.

Click here to watch on YouTube\*:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ybPgmjTRvMo&t=198s>  
Click here to read the transcript:  
[Transcript - The Truth About my Son.pdf](#)



## And what if you even have to work and concentrate on a business meeting or conversation?

Scott Christian Sava has created the animation “What Does Overstimulation Sound Like To Someone With Autism?”.

Click here to watch on YouTube\*:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C2QJPjS2a0>  
Click here to read the transcript:  
[Transcript - Overstimulation.pdf](#)

# Specific strengths of neurodivergent people at work

## It's all about being differently wired.

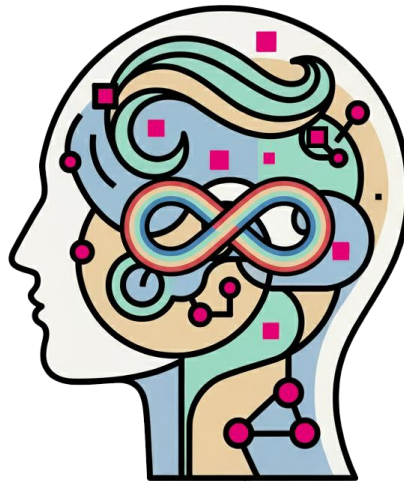
Thinking out of the box is a famous concept in creativity and management consulting. Breaking out of traditional patterns has enabled evolution of mankind, and more recently technology.

Along these lines, neurodivergent brains process information differently than the majority, that is literally the meaning of *neurodivergent*. That is neither better nor worse, it is **different**.

This difference can manifest itself in various ways:

**Let us take vision as an example:** A neurodivergent brain could influence

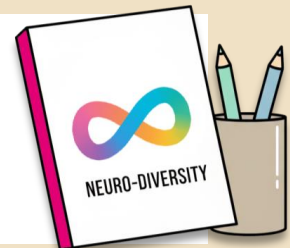
- your reading ability (e.g. dyslexia, or both eyes reading independently)
- the way you perceive colors (e.g. color blindness, or perceiving numbers as colors as one form of synesthesia)



## Employers report specific strengths of neurodivergent employees at work:

- Facts-based problem-solving capability that often exceeds that of neurotypical individuals by far
- Facts-based decision making, nearly immune to groupthink or unconscious bias
- Fast information processing on a very detailed level
- Creative thinking
- Really listen to what people say
- Great loyalty to their employers, if they feel supported and have neurodivergent-friendly roles

Neurodivergent colleagues think and act differently from the majority. Taking advantage of their individual capabilities is good for our business.



# Living and working in disguise: Masking

By definition, **neurodivergent individuals** are different from the majority of the specific society they live in. The socially expected behavior in that society might not appear natural and intuitive to a neurodivergent individual.

But neurodivergent individuals will actively try to display that expected behavior. This activity is called **masking**.

**Masking** can cost of a lot effort.



Masking does not reduce your sensitivity, and while you are trying to behave according to expectations you have to stand sensory overload at the same time.

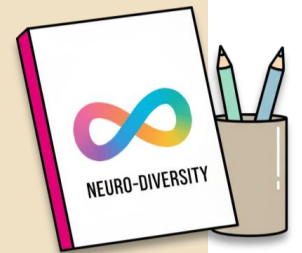
Do you want to know how this feels? Imagine how it might feel to concentrate on your work while you are blinded from strong spotlights or sitting next to a starting jet plane.



Masking means not acting intuitively, but having to be actively monitoring and **decoding social behavior** in your environment, and having to consciously **calculate your reactions**. Therefore, masking is a very energy consuming and maybe even exhausting task.

You cannot even simply stop masking. It has been a part of your socialization. Often it has become an autopilot.

Neurodivergent colleagues have to invest a considerable portion of energy for the sake of appearing „normal“. By giving them a chance to be authentic, this energy can be made available for business.



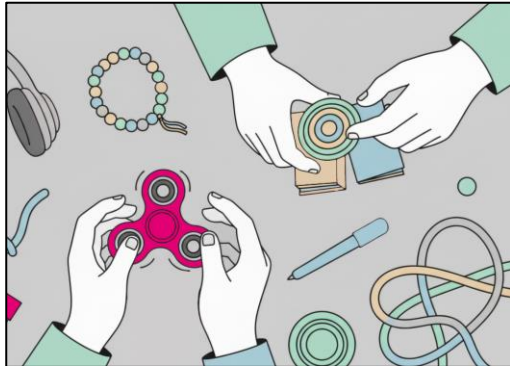
# Living and working in disguise: Stimming

## Self-stimulatory behavior

„stimming“ describes repetitive behavior that is aimed at preventing overstimulation or sensory overload by environmental stimuli that cannot be controlled by the individual.

Stimming can be performed for example by

- physical movements (e.g. fidgeting one's finger ring or a pen)
- moving around
- making sounds



Stimming is not always successful, and once a neurodivergent person is overwhelmed by sensory overload, they might seek surroundings with as little as possible environmental stimuli such as sound or light.

Silent rooms are a good place to recover, and they are available in many office buildings, sometimes it is even possible to dim the lights.



Neurodivergent colleagues perform stimming because they want to concentrate on you and their tasks.



# How can I be supportive (1/3)

## Provide psychological safety

- Create safe spaces in your team communication.
- Be clear and explicit in your communication. Communicate expectations explicitly.
- Get to know the person better so that you know how to manage them. Adapt your communication style to each respective person.
- Empower and lead by objectives instead of restricting people's creativity by micro-management. It may be possible to reach or even exceed the target by doing it a different way.
- Encourage self-care at work. Some people might need to use tools for stimming, other may need to move their muscles, e.g. wander around in order to best focus on their work.



# How can I be supportive (2/3)

## Embrace diversity

- Involve as many diverse staff as reasonably possible into design and decision processes
- Plan team-building activities in line with all team members' needs in mind. Avoid peer pressure. Embed team-building activities into core work rather than socializing outside work-hours.
- Insightful and progressive leadership — don't take status quo for granted, how can we do it better?
- Adapt management style to individual (command vs. empower according to seniority and reliability).
- Engage in communities / employee resource groups.



# How can I be supportive (3/3)

## Offer organizational or technical support

- Consider sensory sensitivity/triggers in workplace setup.
- Enable nonverbal means of communication, not restricted to written input into discussions but also leading discussions or taking decisions nonverbally.
- Inform yourself and your colleagues about available silent rooms on your premises, that can be temporarily used to withdraw or recover from sensory overload.
- Offer and provide noise canceling headsets (preferably with active noise canceling or “ANC”).
- Allow for flexible work practices to accommodate diverse working styles and requirements, e.g. flexible meeting breaks, working in small groups or from home.
- Offer and promote neurodiversity awareness trainings.



# Where can I get more information?

## Learn more about the neurotypes

There is a lot of information on neurodiversity available on the internet. Most of it is provided by scientific researchers, medical institutions, self help and neurodiversity advocacy organizations and business consultancies.

You might find the following resources helpful\*:



The Autism Spectrum according to Autistic People:  
<https://neuroclastic.com/>



<https://www.mensa.org/>

## Neurodiversity @ the workplace

Neurodiversity and what it means for companies has become increasingly relevant. Open office spaces, working from home and easy availability of high-quality office equipment have led to a new self-concept of neurodivergent employees (and employers).

Here are suggestions for further reading\*:



Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability:  
<https://askearn.org/page/neurodiversity-resources>



Neurodiversity @ Work Employer Roundtable:  
<https://disabilityin.org/what-we-do/committees/neurodiversity-at-work-roundtable/>



Neurodiversity at work: a biopsychosocial model and the impact on working adults, 2020:  
<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7732033/>

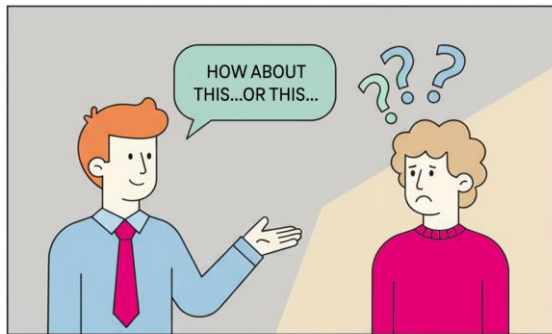


Neurodiversity at Work 2023, Demand, Supply and a Gap Analysis:  
<https://www.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/media/109514758/neurodiversity-in-business-birkbeck-university-of-london.pdf>

# Guide to neuro-affirmative language

## Language is very important

Neurodivergent colleagues will understand your words very literally, so you better communicate as accurately and precisely as possible. No worries, your neurodivergent colleagues will not feel offended but will appreciate your clear words.



If you feel insecure how to address your neurodivergent colleagues or don't want to ask, there is a concise general guide displayed on the right side.

Also, there are more extensive guides on *neuro-affirmative language* available on the internet, e.g.



Neurodiverse Connection:  
<https://ndconnection.co.uk/resources/p/nd-affirming-language-guide>  
 (last retrieved June 26, 2025)



Do	Don't
Autistic person, Autistic ("Identity First Language")	Person with autism, Person on the spectrum ("Person First Language")
Disabled person	Person with a disability
Neurological difference	Disorder / Disease / Illness
Autism, Autism spectrum	Autism spectrum disorder, Asperger syndrome, Highfunctioning autism, ASD
individually strengths / weaknesses / needs	mild / severe autism
is autistic	Suffers from / has autism
Characteristics	Symptoms/ impairments
Differences in communication, perception, etc.	Social impairments / Lacks Social Skills
Neurotypical, non-autistic, different	normal

# Dos and Don'ts in a nutshell

## The Dos

- Express yourself clearly and explicitly.
- Offer support.
- Be open minded.
- Invite neurodivergent talent, emphasize individual strengths over perceived deficits.
- Appreciate innovative ideas, and also your colleagues' personal needs, even if you have difficulty understanding those needs.
- Allow for and encourage stimming etc. in meetings.
- Consider neurodivergent-friendly meeting set-up.
- Think twice before disapproving a behavior - there will be a reason behind.

## The Don'ts

- Don't expect your team member to read your mind, particularly if you cannot yet phrase your thoughts precisely.
- Don't „force“ your support on anybody.
- Don't try to make diagnoses.
- Don't recommend to have diagnoses made.
- Don't make assumptions what a person requires but ask.
- Don't take stimming, missing eye-contact, or meeting participation without camera as disinterest.

This will be beneficial for the whole team, not only for neurodivergent colleagues.



# Glossary

**ADHD** stands for “Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder”. Among persons with ADHD the term Kinetic Cognitive Style (KCS) is preferred.

**Accommodations** can be technical or organizational solutions designed to help neurodivergent (or also impaired) individuals in a workplace setting.

**Autism** is short for „Autism Spectrum Disorder“. Autistic people show differences in sensory processing, communication and focused interests. Many require routine and stimming.

**Dyslexia** is characterized by difficulties in spelling, reading or writing.

**Employee resource group (ERG)** means a group of employees with shared interests or characteristics that work together for the benefit of their business and their group members.

**Executive functions** are cognitive processes that enable target-oriented behavior, e.g. by controlling or inhibiting, or by use of working memory.

**Groupthink** is a group dynamic phenomenon of avoiding conflicts when taking decisions. Individual positions will not be outspoken if they may risk group harmony, therefore the decision outcome will be less facts-based.

**Masking** is a term for a neurodivergent person trying to act as if belonging to the neuro-normative majority by consciously copying socially expected behavior.

**Neuro-affirmative language** avoids medical descriptions of deficits or disorders when referring to neurodivergent individuals.

**Neurocognitive functions** are brain functions linked to specific brain areas.

**Silent Rooms** are rooms in office buildings that are shielded against noise. They can be accessed in order to withdraw from noise or sensory overload.

**Unconscious bias** means automatic thoughts and feelings that shape our opinions and behavior without us realizing it. Unconscious bias, as the name implies, operates at an unconscious level.

# Acknowledgements

## We would like to express our thanks to:

- All members of a dedicated working group within DT Neurodiversity Community that acted as international sounding board and gave valuable feedback and input in the creation of this guide,
- Birgit Bohle and her team for giving neurodiversity a visibility within Deutsche Telekom group,
- The management teams of „Integrierte Access Planung/ Active Access“ (T-IAA) and more specifically „Kooperation, Förderung, Projekte“ (T-KFP) and „Fixed Access Network“ (T-FAN) for providing working resources and advice to the Neurodiversity Community Coreteam,
- Colleagues at „Legal IPR Support“ that volunteered to provide legal advice,
- Group Brand Management Deutsche Telekom AG for helping to design this presentation on brand,
- Everybody else who contributed by input or feedback.



**”I feel so much more included now!”**

*Neurodiversity Community member*

Deutsche Telekom’s Neurodiversity Community is an employee resource group (ERG) with more than 860 members worldwide.

(December 2025)



# Publisher

This guideline was created by the employee network **“Neurodiversity Community” within Deutsche Telekom.**

This is an external version without internal links, internal contact options, and internal processes.

Employees can find the

[↗ internal version here](#)