

A Neurodiversity Toolkit

Foreword

3SC has been working in the neurodiversity space since 2019. We know from our own experience that having neurodiverse teams is immensely helpful for our organisation. Teams made up of a range of ‘different thinkers’ helps us to be more creative, make less errors and enables us to overcome adversity. We also recognise that people have different skills and talents and sometimes need support to be their best selves. The same is true for participants on our programmes, our customers and the organisations we deliver services for.



Around 20% of the UK population is thought to be neurodivergent.

We know that one in three people involved in the justice system are neurodiverse and we estimate that at least 40% of job seekers are likely to be neurodiverse. Unemployment for neurodivergent adults is three times the rate for people with a disability and eight times the rate for people without disabilities.

Often neurodivergent people can struggle to engage with mainstream programmes and services. We have put together this Toolkit to share some of our own learning and help you provide better, more engaging services for our talented neurodiverse participants, customers and colleagues.

We hope you find it useful!

About Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity refers to variations in the human brain and cognition in everyone in the areas of sociability, learning, attention, mood, and other mental functions.

The simplest definition of neurodiversity is thinking differently.

Neurodiversity Umbrella term to describe difference in the human brain

Neurodivergence A brain that 'diverges' from the majority/neurotypical brain

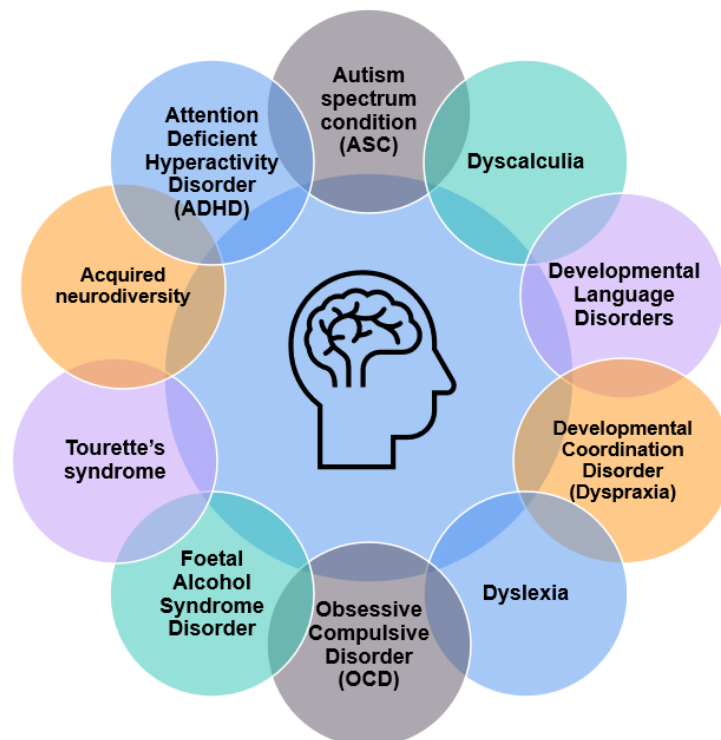
Neurotypical A person without a diagnosis or self-declared neurodivergence

Like the term 'mental health', it is neutral, being neither positive nor negative. Our attitudes, values and beliefs determine how we relate to the term.

Check in with yourself: do you associate neurodiversity with particularly negative or positive traits?



Neurodiversity can cover a range of conditions. The most common are:



Purpose of the Toolkit

There is no ‘one size fits all’ approach to neurodiversity. However, the general trends, tips and advice in this tool kit are applicable in an above average number of cases. Knowing these may make your working relationship with a neurodiverse individual more comfortable and effective.

In the toolkit we will look at:

Assessments and Diagnosis	Top tips	Tools
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview • Descriptions • General Characteristics • Mental health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appointments • Be mindful • Ask • Coaching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wellbeing spaces • Executive functioning, memory and cognition aids • Reading, writing and numbers • Sensory and environment • Behaviour and emotions • Meltdowns

Assessments and Diagnosis

Overview

Some people may have received a diagnosis during their childhood or adolescent years – often due to challenges noticed at school. However, many conditions still go undiagnosed into adulthood.

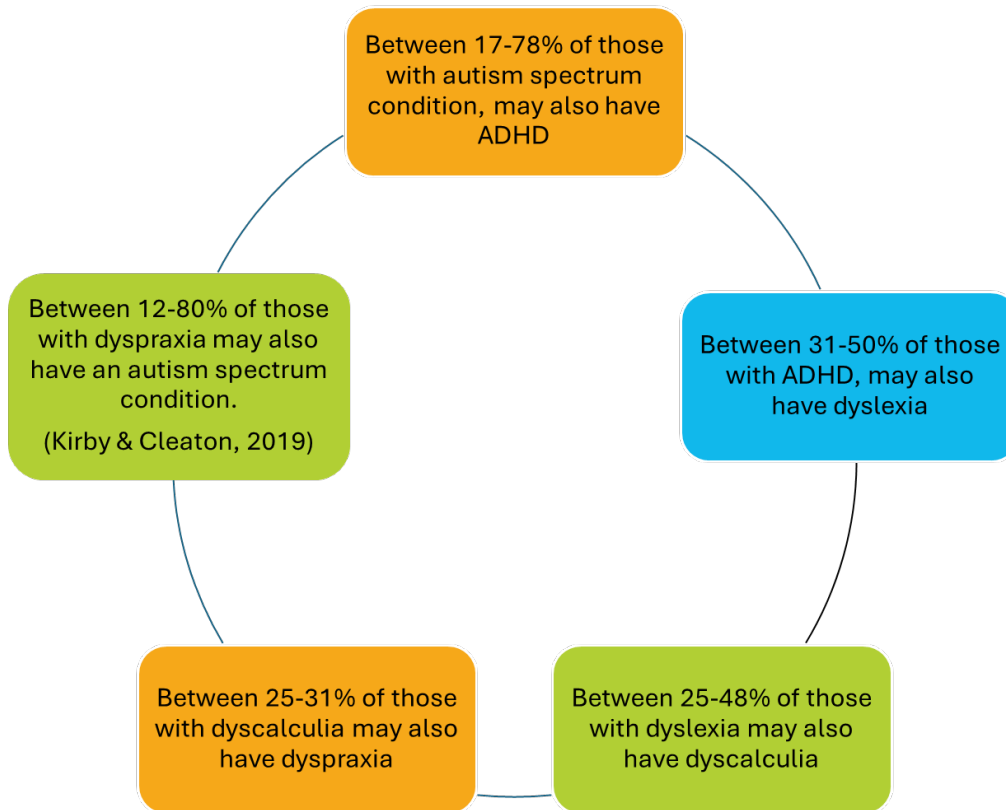
A neurodiversity diagnosis can often help people make sense of what they are going through and often relieve pressure they may have placed on themselves. A sensitive and understanding approach can reduce feelings of stigma and potential discrimination that may come alongside a diagnosis.

Descriptions

All conditions will vary in impact on the person, meaning that no two people with the same condition will present the same.

These traits could occur in more than one of the neurodiverse conditions. In the diagram below, it has been organised according to effect.

This will also account for the relatively high likelihood of co-occurrence:



There is growing evidence that hypermobility and Ehlers-Danlos syndrome (EDS) may be commonly linked to neurodiversity. This can have an impact for the individual in terms of pain, fatigue, and digestive issues.

As there can be such a wide variety of traits amongst individuals some of the following may seem to contradict one another. However, these may also be situational such as being skilled at problem solving in familiar areas whilst having difficulty grasping new concepts; or excellent focus in areas of interest which is poorer as interest decreases. **Remember, there is also no harm in asking an individual to explain to you how they experience their condition.**



General Characteristics

Below follows a general summary of characteristics underneath the umbrella term for neurodiversity. The summary will be divided into five categories. When we cover the 'tools' section in the toolkit, we will refer to these five categories again.

Executive function, memory, and cognition

- Excellent long-term memory.
- Excellent problem solving & Creativity.
- “Outside the box” problem solving.
- ‘Big picture’ thinking.
- Challenges with time management and organisation.
- Great ability to focus.
- Can find focusing difficult.
- May need longer to process information.
- Takes more time to learn new skills.

Reading, writing, and numeracy

- Counting in ones.
- Can learn numbers and sums by repetition but have less understanding of how answers are achieved.
- Can have difficulty with budgeting finances and managing time.
- Incorrect or distorted writing.
- Do not find it easy to skim read text.
- Mixing up visually similar words.
- Below average reading and writing.
- Above average reading and writing.

Sensory and environment

- Sensory sensitivity – discomfort or ‘pain’ from certain sounds, smells, touch, or visual stimuli.
- Can find it difficult to run, jump, or tie shoelaces.
- May appear clumsy.
- Reduced hearing or eyesight.



- May prefer an environment with low simulation
- May prefer an environment with high simulation

Behaviour

- Impulsive behaviour.
- Not finishing jobs and tasks.
- Impatience.
- Repetitive behaviour.
- Easy to tire.
- Touching people and things.
- Echolalia (repeating words) and coprolalia (shouting and swearing) – not as common in Tourette syndrome as stereotypically believed.
- A need to find out everything about a subject.
- Subject matter expertise.

Social

- Excellent verbal communicator.
- Difficulty understanding how others think or feel (theory of mind).
- Challenges around social interactions.
- Anxiety around social situations.

Mental Health

Neurodiversity is not a mental health problem. It is a different way of thinking and interacting with the world.

Although, some people with neurodiversity can have anxiety, stress, and depression, this is not part of neurodiversity.

Many who are neurodivergent do not have any mental health concerns.



Top Tips

Appointments

When making appointments, make its purpose clear. Don't assume the client knows why they have an appointment with you.

If you are sending an introductory email or make a call, include the following five points:

The screenshot shows an email draft with the following content and callouts:

- To:** Cassie
- Cc:**
- Dear Cassie
- 1 Your name:** My name is Fatima. I am from the company 3SC and am contacting you regarding your
- 2 Where you are from:** virtual coaching appointment next week Tuesday at 13h00.
- 3 Reason for email/calling:**
- 4 Format and length of appointment:** The appointment will be on Teams, and it will be an hour. I will send the Teams link to you in a moment, and please let me know if I can help you to set it up.
- 5 Instructions to meeting/venue:**
- Top Tip:** Here is a link to my bio so you can get to know more about me and our company beforehand [3SC – Partnerships with Purpose](#).
- Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns
- Kind regards
Fatima

Add a link to your website, including a welcome wall of staff with pictures so they can see what you and the environment look like. If you do, we guarantee your attendance rate will go up!

Be Mindful

Groups of people, new environments and taking in new information can be distracting and overwhelming.

For a neurodiverse person, this appointment is a huge drain on their energy, they will be stressed out coming in, having to use



energy for things many of us take for granted, like socialising, getting there on time and processing verbal and written information.

They will leave with a huge sigh of relief and likely have a massive nap (or possibly even a meltdown) when they get home. You can really help them by being mindful of all these things. Use this checklist to make it easier for them:

- Have a look at the information you're giving – is it all text?
- Can some of it be given in an infographic form?
- Or can it be bullet pointed?
- Is it in clear plain language?
- Is your induction in group form?
- What time of day is it?
- Consider offering flexible options for meeting.
- Offer quiet times when there will be less people.
- In an initial call you could explain the format of the induction and ask if they have any sensory issues and if so, offer a different way to do it.

Ask how they learn

They may not be in a learning environment, but they are learning if you are giving them information.

Always ask your client:

- How do you take information in?
- How do you learn?



Say to neurodiverse people, **“I’m going to ask a question, you don’t have to answer now, I’ll ask again in a few minutes.”**

And give them time to answer.

This allows the brain to process the information. If you ask and expect an answer immediately, chances are they will feel under pressure and awkward which adds to the pressure. They will think they look flustered, and this will add to their anxiety. Giving them the time and space to answer can really help both them and you. An even better approach is to give the person the questions you will ask in advance of the meeting.

Consider expert coaching

Neurodiversity itself can feel overwhelming, but if you understand the fact that all our brains are unique and if you start taking action to implement some or all the tips, it will be essential for success in all forms of business.

Expert coaching can give you the space to consider your advisory practice. It can help you to gain knowledge and understanding of the neurodiverse so you can confidently support your clients and gain top results.

You don’t have to do it alone!

Let our expert coaches guide you with our range of services including companywide awareness sessions and bespoke individualised coaching strategies.

Contact the team for more information: coaching@3sc.org

Tools

What helps one person might be vastly different to what helps another, some ideas are included below but it is much more important to talk to the person – ask their preferences for comfort, learning and communication styles.

Creating a wellbeing space:

Obviously, it will be necessary to work with the space and resources you have available, but here are some ideas on how to create a safer and more welcoming space:

- Plants can help lower stress and freshen the air.
- Colours associated with wellbeing are often pale, calming colours. Other colours such as orange can be associated with joyfulness and optimism. Whereas red has a connection with anger and should be avoided.
- Sufficient but not overpowering lighting. Table lamps can create a more 'homely' space.
- Stress balls, fidget aids and adult colouring books in waiting areas.
- 'Safe spaces' should be accessible without walking through crowded areas.
- Releasing emotions can be a powerful experience and some people may become tearful so a box of tissues may be helpful.



- A small sofa where someone could lie down may be an advantage for those who become overwhelmed.

Executive function, memory, and cognition aids:

- Quiet space in order to be able to focus and concentrate. It sounds simple, but it is so important.

- There are many online calendars and apps available to help organise tasks, days and to-do lists. Tiimo, (<https://www.tiimoapp.com>), is a visual daily planner designed with neurodiversity in mind. The app has a free forever version, but to use all features a premium subscription is required.



- Alternatively, an individual may wish to create their own to-do lists and organisers using more traditional notebooks and planners.
- Technology such as Siri, Google Home, or Alexa can be used to give task reminders, timers, and soothing music. Timers can be used to allow ‘permitted distraction time’ whereby an individual feeling overwhelmed can give themselves 5 minutes to take a break from a task before returning to it.
- This could also be used with the ‘Pomodoro Technique’ – completing a task in 3 x 25 minute segments with a 5 minute break between each.
- Tile (<https://uk.tile.com/en/>) offer various solutions for finding lost items (cost varies across products) ranging from stickers to bluetooth tags that can be used to find misplaced keys, remote controls, etc.

- Preparation time for new situations and experiences is important. Giving questions in advance of requiring the answers may help reduce stress caused by needing to think quickly in the moment. Similarly, an individual may need a clear outline about the nature of appointments and what will be covered, and questions that might be asked during those meetings.
- Learning/communication styles: some individuals may find it easier to process new information if it's presented in an auditory style, whereas others may favour a visual medium. Having options available for varying styles can be beneficial.
- Having a rigid schedule or routine may work better for some. Acknowledge that there may be a difference between the individuals chronological and developmental age.
- Try not to overwhelm with decisions.



Reading, writing, and numbers:

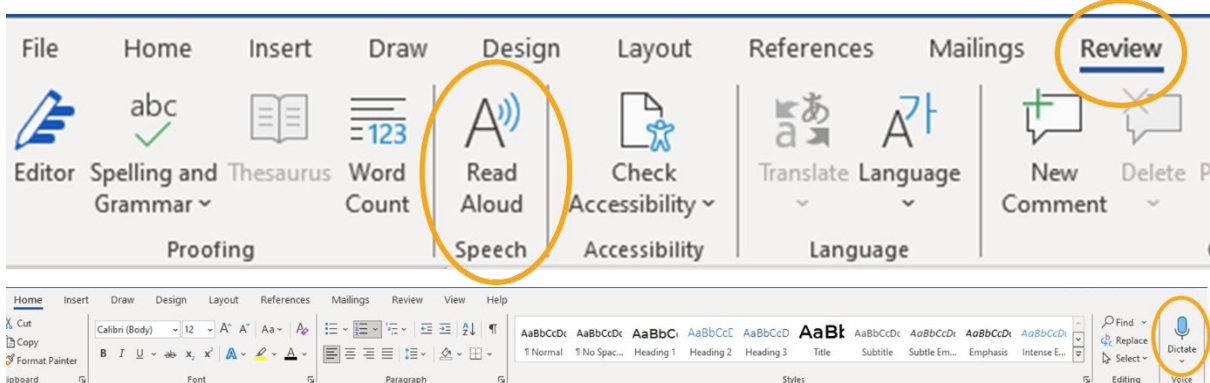
- Calculators may help someone complete maths tasks. They may need 'cue cards' alongside this depending on their level of the understanding of the process. For example '+' adds, '-' takes away.
- Budgeting tools such as Snoop (<https://snoop.app/>) or bank accounts such as Mozo (<https://monzo.com/>) include tools to help budget and control spending. However, while both products have a free version, some tools are only available with a monthly subscription.



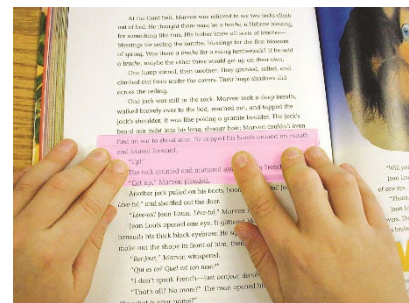
- Using a keyboard via a laptop, tablet or phone may be easier for some individuals. Although those with motor skills challenges may find smaller tablets and phones difficult also.
- Using mind maps and post-it notes to compose ideas and prepare for longer pieces of writing.
- Graph paper with squares can help some individuals better align their handwriting.



- Assistive technologies such as speech recognition software, text to speech software and the ability to scan handwritten pages to word documents may be useful. Microsoft Word has these useful features:



- Presenting information in ways other than written where preferable and possible.
- Eye lighters can be used to highlight and assist with the reading of printed text (<https://www.dyslexic.com/product/eye-lighter-reading-ruler/>).
- A clear font style (e.g. Comic Sans) at size 12-14 may be easier to read as text can appear less cluttered.

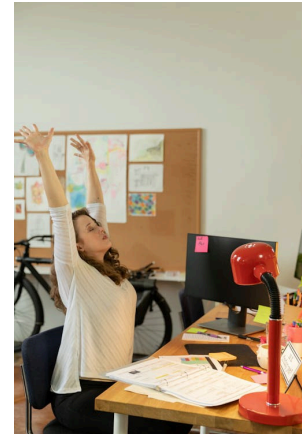


Avoid the use of black text on a white background wherever possible. For example, changing the background colour of a screen, using coloured “overlays” and printing onto pastel coloured paper are often beneficial.

- Using greater spacing between words.

Sensory and environment:

- Noise cancelling ear/headphones (to reduce sensory over-simulation) may be beneficial to some individuals.
- Allow for practice of new skills in a stress free environment.
- Reduce clutter in the environment where possible.
- Provide ample ‘personal space’ for movement (and those with touching tics).



Behaviour and emotion:

- The 5 point scale developed by Kari Dunn Buron and Mitzi Curtis (2003) is a useful tool for managing emotions, for example:

		I feel	My body cues ...	I can ...
5		Extremely tired. A lot less patient. Annoyed easily.	Exhausted – very low energy. Hot and bothered.	Take a bit of time to be on my own. Slow down, rest and put things into perspective.
4		Anxious. Wondering how I will get everything done. Low energy.	Bit of tightness in my chest. Can't focus very well. Might have a headache.	Have a change of scenery. Spend time with some children or get some fresh air.
3		A little tense. Confidence might feel a bit low.	A bit of a 'fuzzy head' feeling. Tired.	Make sure I eat/drink something. Let someone know how I'm doing.
2		Calm. I might feel a little pressured, but I can handle it.	Quite energetic. Focused on what I need to do.	Remain focussed. Prioritize jobs.
1		Relaxed. Energised. I can do anything!	Lots of energy. Smiling a lot. Able to laugh about things	Enjoy life. Talk to others and share my positive mood.

- Meditation and relaxation techniques – some individuals may suffer greatly with stress and lack of sleep. They may function better in a relaxed state – soothing music and visuals could be used.
- Symptoms are also increased by anxiety and stress (and boredom).

Social:

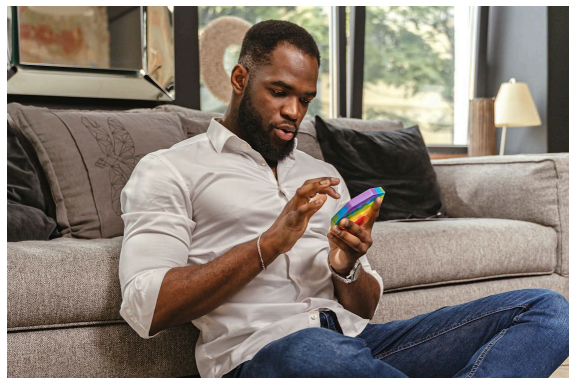
- Assisted technology such as text to speech readers (for those who may be non-verbal).
- An individual may feel more comfortable communicating with hand gestures or Makaton.



- Allow people to ‘get to know’ a person/people prior to first meeting. Short biographies, photos or video/audio messages may make an initial meeting easier.

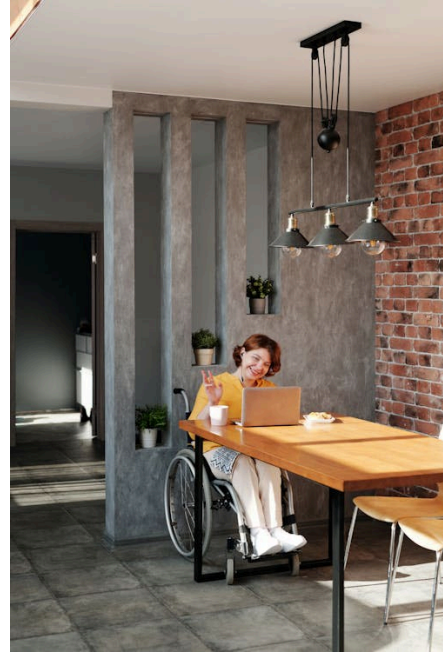
Physical:

- Fidget spinners, stress relief balls and elastic bands can help an individual feel more relaxed.
- Stress relief balls and squishy toys can help improve muscle and motor co-ordination in the hands with consistent practice.



- Understanding that some individuals may find it easier to wear clothes and shoes with velcro fastenings.

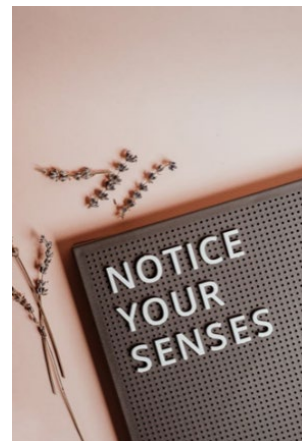
- A small percentage of individuals may be highly sensitized by textiles and clothing. This can be as extreme as being irritated by labels and stitching in clothing.
- Stillness – some individuals with dyspraxia may have difficulties with eye tracking so following a moving object, or looking from one object to another may be difficult.
- Doing one task at a time may be easier.
- Being overly tired can increase the occurrence any condition, and may be more apparent with some conditions, such as Tourette's symptoms.
- Resist the urge to point out or over-focus on tics.



Meltdowns

The above ideas should help to avoid meltdowns – when the neurodivergent individual becomes so overwhelmed they can engage the fight, flight or freeze response. However, should this occur, ensure the person is in a safe place and minimize interaction and stimulation as much as possible. It's human nature to ask the person if they are okay, if they want water, if you can do anything, etc. but ultimately this could add to the person's distress.

During these times of emotional dysregulation it will be more effective to **approach the somatic systems** (the sensory body) as thinking may be clouded.



Some of the following might be helpful if you think the person is heading towards a possible meltdown:

1. Slowly counting down from 10. Similarly singing a slow, favourite song to yourself can be calming.
2. Move any clutter or obstacles if the individual becomes mobile.
3. If you have a soft stress ball available offer it to the individual.
4. Give them plenty of personal space. It may be tempting to offer a reassuring hand but it is best not to.
5. Dim the lights if possible. Sunglasses, headphones and calming music may help.
6. Try not to become frustrated. Talk in a calm, even voice.
7. Give them time.

It is always worth remembering that some of the tools may be useful for more than one condition.

A discussion with the individual is the best way to discover what they think may work.

Support from 3SC

Neurodiversity Training



3SC offers a wide range of training to support individuals and teams to better understand all forms of neurodivergence. Training can be offered online or in person.

Our sessions start from a one-hour session that will fit nicely into a team meeting, and would consist of a general overview of Neurodiversity or specific conditions like; Autism, ADHA, Dyslexia, etc.

For a more in-depth session, we can offer a half day training course on Neurodiversity, Autism or other conditions. These sessions are great for anyone working with or alongside neurodiverse customers or team members.

Organisations really wishing to up skill their people can also book our Level 2 Accredited Neurodiversity Awareness course where we will look at how neurodiverse staff and customers can be best supported on programmes and in their workplaces, so that their neurodiverse talents and skills are fully realised.



Neurodiversity Coaching

Neurodiversity coaching can offer many benefits to employers who implement it for their staff, particularly for creating an inclusive and supportive workplace environment. Other benefits include:

- Encouraging diverse perspectives
- Increased productivity
- Enhanced team dynamics
- Talent retention
- Improved employee well-being
- Overall positive impact on the company culture

Contact us to find out more and discuss your unique organisational situation and needs:

Email: neurodiversity@3sc.org

Telephone: 020 8269 2910



Useful websites:

1. AADD-UK – for adults with ADHD
<https://aadduk.org>

2. ADHD Foundation website
www.adhdfoundation.org.uk

3. British Dyslexia Association
www.bdadyslexia.org.uk

4. Dyscalculia Information Centre
www.dyscalculia.me.uk

5. Dyspraxia Foundation
www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk

6. National Autistic Society
www.autism.org.uk

7. National Police Autism Association
www.npaa.org.uk

8. Public Sector Neurodiversity Network (civil service)
www.twitter.com/PSNeurodiverse

9. Tourettes Action
www.tourettes-action.org.uk

10. Resource Platform – Wales
www.dewis.wales

11. Resource Platform – England
www.hubofhope.co.uk