



# RCSLT guidance to support neurodivergent SLTs in the workplace - Summary

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## Introduction

This RCSLT guidance has been created to share information and advice with the speech and language therapy workforce. It provides support for both neurodivergent SLTs and their non-neurodivergent colleagues. It helps to increase knowledge awareness of neurodivergence within a working environment. RCSLT's strategic vision is committed to equality, diversity and inclusion. This means supporting the challenges as well as the strengths of ND SLTs.

The aim of the guidelines is to:

- Help ND SLTs and their employers to discuss what they need to **thrive at work**.
- Encourage an **inclusive workplace culture** for neurodivergent colleagues.

NDSLUTUK's poll found that 88% of ND SLTs have thought about leaving their jobs (Simpson, 2023).

A group of neurodivergent speech and language therapists and students wrote these guidelines. They are from the peer support group, **NDSLUTUK**.

## Language used

The guidelines list examples of **neurodivergent minorities**, such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and dyspraxia. It recognises that there is still ongoing debate around definitions.

This document uses **identity-first language**, like 'autistic' instead of 'person with autism.' This follows current preferences based on lived experience.

ND - neurodivergent

SLT - refers to speech and language therapists or students on placement

## Guidance format

The guidance is separated into two main parts aimed at different, online audiences:

- [support for Neurodivergent SLTs](#), and
- [support for those working with or managing Neurodivergent colleagues](#).

They can both be found on [the RCSLT's website](#). A reference list and [glossary](#) is also available.

## Overview of the guidance content

### Part 1: Support for neurodivergent SLTs

This section provides tools and advice for Neurodivergent SLTs to help identify strengths and needs. It also details the different kinds of support and adjustments available. The guidance lists resources for those exploring suspected neurodivergence.

Topics include:

- applying for jobs
- disclosing a disability or neurodivergence
- asking for reasonable adjustments
- examples of neuro-affirmative adaptations and reasonable adjustments
- adjustments for sensory differences
- adjustments for communication and language differences, including differences in auditory and/or language processing
- adjustments for mental health, wellbeing and emotional regulation
- access to work

### Part 2: Support for those working with and/or managing neurodivergent SLTs

This part aims to support self-reflection around ableism. It offers practical ideas for developing inclusive workplaces. Promoting an inclusive workplace positively impacts job satisfaction, staff retention, and mental well-being.

Topics include:

- intersectionality and unconscious bias: encourage teams to develop curiosity and growth
- how to deal with disclosures and/or suspected neurodivergence
- recognising neurodivergent strengths alongside needs
- considering adjustments
- adjustments to support ND colleagues
- identifying and targeting knowledge and policy gaps - managers can become champions for change.

- developing psychologically safe environments - allyship
- supporting neurodivergent colleagues throughout their working lives
- working environments
- developing a neuro-affirmative approach to supporting neurodivergent colleagues.

## Key takeaways

- Neurodivergent SLTs have unique strengths and needs. These affect workplace performance differently.
- To create a supportive work environment, **constructive dialogue** is key.
- Managers may need training to provide effective support to neurodivergent colleagues. Managers are urged not to rely on their clinical knowledge of neurodivergence.
- Some neurodivergent people may struggle to know their needs. This is due to the impact of **late diagnosis** and **ableist ideas**.
- The Equality Act (2010) says that employers must make reasonable adjustments in recruitment.
- Refusing adjustments due to perceived unfairness is an example of **direct discrimination**.
- **Burnout** differs from that in neurotypical employees. It is linked more frequently to sensory differences or chronic health issues, such as hypermobility spectrum syndromes.
- Neurodivergent people may mask their difficulties, often without being aware of it.
- Disclosing neurodivergence can be **challenging**. **Fear of discrimination** often leads to non-disclosure.
- Formal assessments by Occupational Health or Access to Work are essential.
- Some personal strategies need **significant mental effort** and may be difficult to keep up over time.
- **Masking** can lead to **burnout** and both mental and physical health issues.
- **Beneficial adjustments** might include providing support workers, flexible work times or job carving. ND coaches and specialist equipment or devices can also help.

- Unconscious bias can lead to unintended discrimination. It can lead to making **assumptions** based on **outdated stereotypes** or misinformation about lived experiences.
- The guidelines encourage SLTs to see neurodivergence as a **difference, not a disorder**.
- Opinions vary on whether managers should raise the possibility of neurodivergence with colleagues.
- The guidelines give advice on how to respond to employees who disclose a diagnosis or suspected neurodivergence. The key message is to **respond with curiosity, affirmation and acceptance**.
- Employers and managers should prioritise creating **emotional and psychological safety**.
- Focus on **problem-solving** when addressing differences. Accept differences without judgment.
- Managers can become **champions for change**.

To read the guidance in full, review references and for a glossary of terms, [visit the RCSLT website](#).

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) is the professional body for speech and language therapists in the UK. As well as providing leadership and setting professional standards, the RCSLT facilitates and promotes research into the field of speech and language therapy, promotes better education and training of speech and language therapists, and provides its members and the public with information about speech and language therapy.

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