







# Neurodiversity in the workplace

## What is neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity refers to a group of neurological development differences that share common features, particularly in how people learn and process information.<sup>1</sup> (See chart below for examples.) The exact number of individuals with neurodiverse conditions is unknown, and estimates vary by source. One estimate, from The National Center for Learning Disabilities, suggests that two percent of the American population, or 4.6 million people, have learning disabilities (which is often used as a proxy for neurodiverse conditions).<sup>2</sup> Other estimates are higher.

In 2016, Wilder Research conducted a survey to learn more about the workplace experiences of individuals with neurodiverse conditions. This summary describes what survey respondents know about neurodiversity and neurodiverse conditions; the workplace experiences of individuals with neurodiverse conditions and their supervisors; and what supports are needed to support neurodiverse employees. The information can be used to help employees and employers understand how employees with neurodiverse conditions contribute to the workplace and what supports can help them succeed in their roles.

Examples of neurodiverse conditions		
	<b>Asperger's syndrome</b>	difficulty with effectively socializing and communication
	<b>ADHD</b>	difficulty with impulsivity, inattention, and/or over-activity
	<b>Dyslexia</b>	difficulty in visual, auditory, or motor process, which interferes with reading and reading comprehension
	<b>Dysgraphia</b>	inability to write coherently
	<b>Dyspraxia</b>	difficulty with speech problems, poor posture, poor sense of directions, and/or difficulty with actions such as throwing and catching
	<b>Dyscalculia</b>	difficulty with mathematics, numbers, or remembering facts over a long period of time

1 Milliken, N. (2015). *Neurodiversity: Employers Need To Help People "Come Out."* Retrieved from <https://talentculture.com/neurodiversity-employers-need-to-help-people-come-out/>

2 National Center for Learning Disabilities. (2014). *The State of Learning Disabilities, Third Edition.* Retrieved from <https://www.nclد.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/2014-State-of-LD.pdf>

# Neurodiversity in the workforce

## What is the experience of employees with neurodiverse conditions?

Ninety-seven of the survey respondents (24%) identified as having at least one neurodiverse condition. The most common conditions identified were ADHD (69%), dyslexia (37%), and dyscalculia (25%). Of this group, 23 were supervisors.

### Inclusivity

Of those with neurodiverse conditions, nearly two-thirds of respondents said their work climate is inclusive (64%) and has a supportive culture for those with neurodiverse conditions (61%). Three-quarters said they are encouraged to be themselves at work (76%) and felt they are treated equally and fairly (75%). Twenty-three percent of respondents feel their employer actively recruits and hires people with neurodiverse condition(s).

### Disclosure

Forty-three percent of respondents who had neurodiverse conditions had never reported their neurodiverse condition to an employer. Thirty-eight percent disclosed their condition to their most recent employer. Of those, 54 percent reported that the disclosure improved their work situation. Employees described feeling better about their position and having an employer that was accommodating to their needs. Five percent reported that it made things worse. Some of these employees described job changes, reduction of hours, and poor treatment by colleagues. The rest said it made some things better and some things worse.

Respondents most often disclosed a neurodiverse condition after they were hired (68%). They said they disclosed their condition when they were feeling more comfortable with supervisors and coworkers (41%), but sometimes when they were having difficulties (11%).

### How we learned about neurodiverse conditions in the workforce

Data was collected through an online survey (using Survey Monkey) in winter 2016. The survey was customized to be user-friendly for individuals with neurodiverse conditions, with modifications made to question wording, visual display, and for voice reader accessibility.

Project staff recruited a convenience sample through email, websites, social media, online forums, and listservs. Schools, nonprofit organizations, government offices, large corporations, and other employers were invited to participate. Participants had to be at least 18 years of age and have experience as an employee or supervisor. Four hundred and thirty-seven individuals participated in the survey. The majority were female (78%); aged 25 to 64 (79%); and had completed at least a post-secondary education (91%). The percentage of females and post-secondary educated individuals is higher than the general population.

Nearly half of the respondents (48%) who have not disclosed to their current or most recent employer felt their condition does not impact their work. Others expressed concern that their supervisor or coworkers would not understand (42%) or would treat them differently because of their condition (35%), or feared that they would lose health care coverage (7%). Twenty-five percent offered other reasons, including that they never thought about it, were afraid of the reaction or stigma, felt the information was irrelevant, had no diagnosis, or felt it was difficult to share about disabilities.

## » ACCOMMODATIONS

Sixty-seven percent of employees who disclosed a neurodiverse condition reported that they needed workplace adjustments or accommodations. However, fewer employees requested accommodations. Accommodations most frequently requested were modified work schedules, adjustment in how work tasks are communicated, and adjusted work duties. Employers provided adjustments to duties or work tasks to two-thirds of employees who requested them. They offered modified work schedules to fewer than half of the employees that requested them.

## » DISCRIMINATION

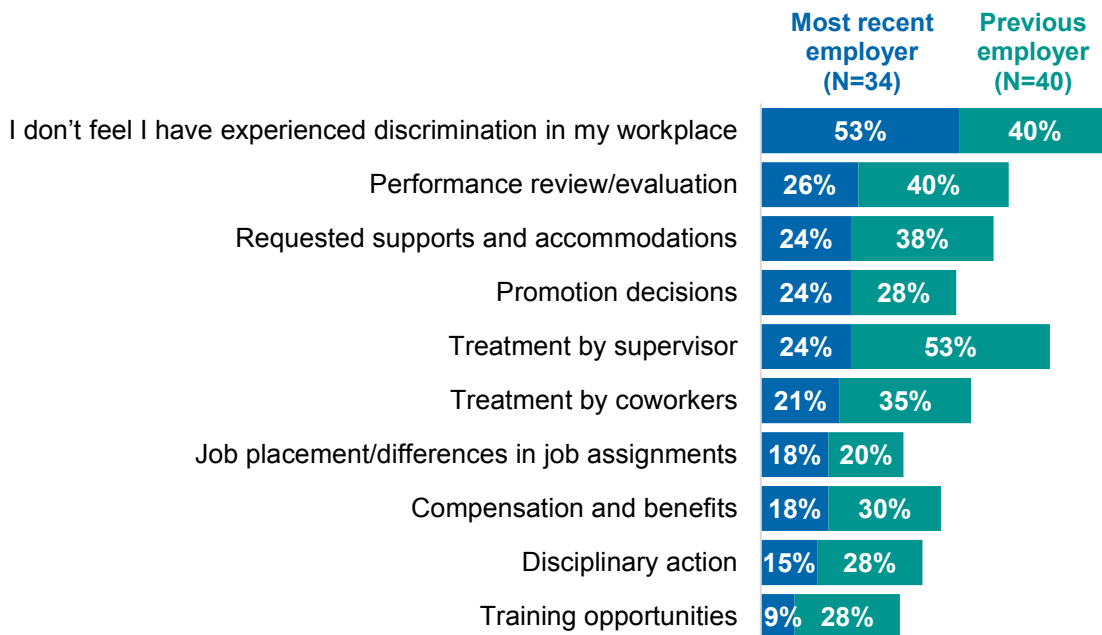
Regardless of disclosure status, 46 percent of respondents with neurodiverse conditions have felt discriminated against, harassed, or bullied because of their neurodiverse condition. Of the 27 employees who experienced harassment at least some days, 70 percent reported that it had a significant impact on their overall physical and mental health.

Approximately half of respondents who had disclosed to their **most recent** employer (47%) experienced discrimination, harassment, or bullying in their workplace because of their neurodiverse condition. A quarter of the employees said they experienced discrimination in performance reviews or evaluations, requested supports and accommodations, promotion decisions, and treatment by a supervisor.

Of those who had disclosed to a **previous** employer (47% of all neurodiverse respondents), 60 percent felt they had experienced discrimination, most commonly in treatment by a supervisor, performance reviews and evaluations, requested supports and accommodations, or treatment by coworkers (Figure 1).

Twenty-eight percent of respondents who had disclosed their neurodiverse condition had experienced a supervisor or coworker inappropriately sharing that disclosure with others.

## 1. Workplace discrimination experienced by employees with neurodiverse conditions



Note: Respondents were asked to select all answers that applied.

## What are employers' experiences supervising employees with neurodiverse conditions?

Supervisors' experience and knowledge about supervising neurodiverse employees is limited. One hundred and thirty-eight of respondents were in a supervisory or managerial role at work. Of those, 23 (17%) had neurodiverse conditions.

Sixty-four percent of supervisors had experience assessing skills, abilities, and interests of employees with neurodiverse conditions. Fewer had the knowledge needed to effectively supervise employees with neurodiverse conditions (4%), experience providing accommodations (34%), reviewing or modifying training manuals (31%), or supervising employees with neurodiverse conditions (35%).

## What are resources for supervising neurodiverse employees?

Supervisors described a high-level understanding that they should (due to law or internal policies) accommodate employees with disabilities, but they lacked the understanding and knowledge about needs and available supports to do so effectively. For instance, supervisors said they were most aware of legislation such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) or Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) (69%) and their workplace's policies and procedures related to the treatment and support of employees

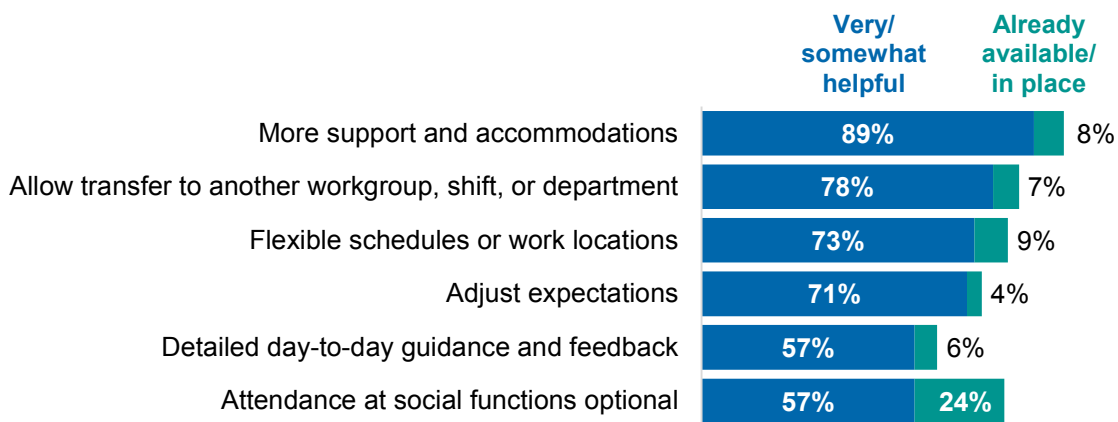
with disabilities (68%). However, they were less likely to know about the needs of employees with neurodiverse conditions (43%) and accommodations available in their specific workplace (50%).

## What are helpful supports for employees with neurodiverse conditions?

### » DIRECT SUPPORT FOR EMPLOYEES

Respondents with neurodiverse conditions shared their opinions of helpful workplace practices. They most frequently suggested more support and accommodations for those with neurodiverse conditions and allowing employees to transfer to another workgroup, shift, or department. Fewer suggested detailed day-to-day guidance and feedback or making employee attendance at social functions optional. Nearly a quarter of respondents said their workplace already made social functions optional (Figure 2).

#### 2. Supports considered helpful by employees with neurodiverse conditions (N=90-93)



### » TRAINING OTHER EMPLOYEES ABOUT NEURODIVERSE CONDITIONS

The majority of respondents with neurodiverse conditions indicated training for human resource staff and more education for all employees would also be helpful (Figure 3).

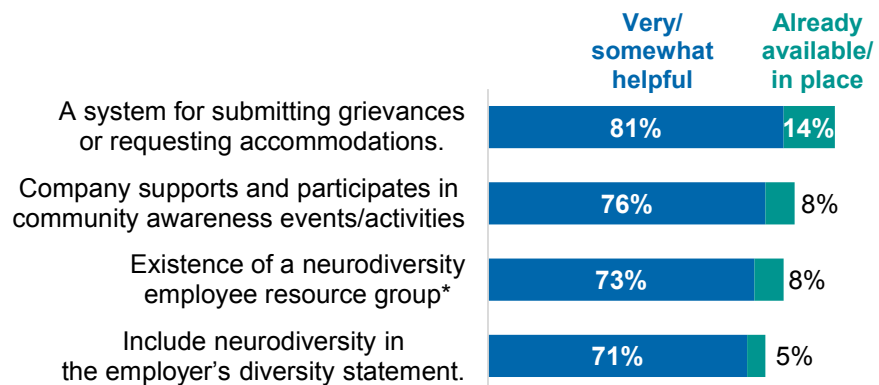
#### 3. Training considered helpful by employees with neurodiverse conditions (N=94-91)



## » POLICY-LEVEL SUPPORTS

Regarding policy-level supports for neurodiverse employees, most respondents felt a system for submitting grievances or requesting accommodations would be helpful, though several (14%) noted this option is already available in their workplace. Employees would also like to see employers participate in community awareness events related to neurodiversity, create a neurodiversity Employee Resource Group, and include neurodiversity in organizational diversity statements (Figure 4).

### 4. Helpful policy-level supports for employees with neurodiverse conditions (N=91-93)

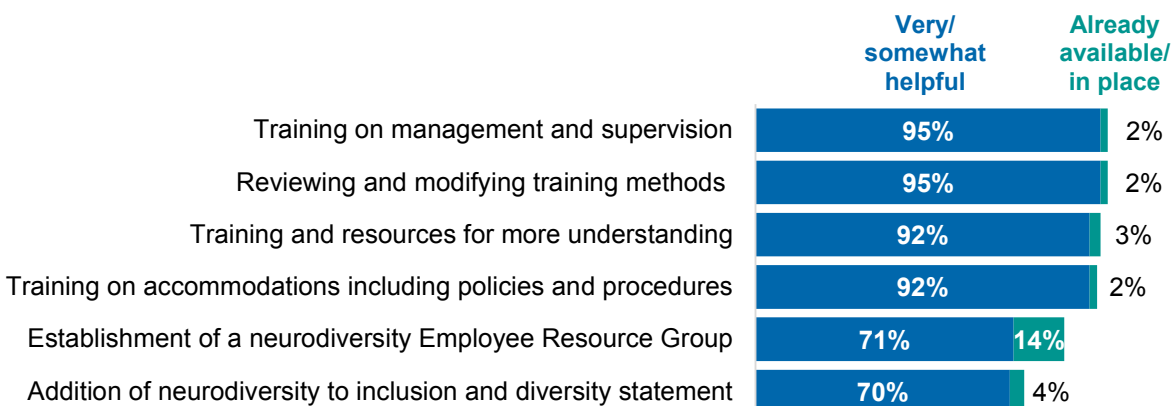


\* Affinity groups or business network groups are employees who meet together in their workplaces based on shared experiences

## » HELPFUL SUPPORTS FOR SUPERVISORS

Over 90 percent of supervisors said guidance on supporting employees with neurodiverse conditions would be helpful. This could include information on supervising or offering resources to employees with neurodiverse conditions or providing appropriate training and resources to all employees. Similar to the responses of employees with neurodiverse conditions, two-thirds of supervisors agreed establishing a neurodiversity Employee Resource Group or adding neurodiversity to the inclusion and diversity statement would be helpful (Figure 5).

### 5. Helpful supports for supervisors of employees with neurodiverse conditions (N=128-129)



# How can employers use this information?

As awareness of neurodiversity in the workforce grows, there are opportunities for employers to learn how to make workplaces more welcoming. This research shows that employees with neurodiverse conditions face discrimination and can be hesitant to reveal their condition, often because they are concerned that others will not understand or will treat them differently because of their condition. At the same time, employers are not always experienced in the practical side of supporting employees with neurodiverse conditions. Research also shows that the accommodations most frequently offered to employees with neurodiverse conditions do not always match the accommodations requested.

Employees and employers have similar suggestions on supporting employees with neurodiverse conditions including:

- Provide training for human resources staff and supervisors, including ways to manage, support, and provide accommodations for employees with neurodiverse conditions
- Expand the range of available accommodations for employees with neurodiverse conditions by reviewing training methods, coverage/leave policies, and most frequently requested accommodations, and modifying policies as needed
- Address the stigma of neurodiverse conditions by educating all employees on neurodiversity in general, cultivating a culture of acceptance, and disciplining employees for bullying coworkers with neurodiverse conditions

Implementing trainings and offering appropriate accommodations to meet the needs of employees with neurodiverse conditions, as well as potential employees and those not involved in the workforce, can strengthen an organization and help it attract and retain employees with diverse skills.

Many resources are available about neurodiverse conditions. Some helpful websites for supervisors are listed below. Additional information can be found in the many websites devoted to a specific neurodiverse condition.

### Resources available for supervisors

Job Accommodation Network [www.askjan.org](http://www.askjan.org)

The National Resource on ADHD (CHADD) [www.chadd.org](http://www.chadd.org)

Institute for Community Inclusion [www.communityinclusion.org](http://www.communityinclusion.org)

International Dyslexia Association [www.dyslexiaida.org](http://www.dyslexiaida.org)

PACER [www.pacer.org](http://www.pacer.org)

Understood [www.understood.org](http://www.understood.org)

There are also a number of options for literacy software that help with communication including:  
[www.texthelp.com/en-us/products/read-write](http://www.texthelp.com/en-us/products/read-write)

**Wilder  
Research**  
Information. Insight. Impact.

451 Lexington Parkway North  
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55104  
651-280-2700  
[www.wilderresearch.org](http://www.wilderresearch.org)



AMHERST H.  
**WILDER**  
FOUNDATION  
ESTABLISHED 1906  
**Here for good.**

#### For more information

More information about this report, contact Grant Watkins at the Wilder Foundation, 651-280-2504 or [grant.watkins@wilder.org](mailto:grant.watkins@wilder.org).

Authors: Laura Martell Kelly and Nora Johnson

JULY 2017