



**Victorian
Public Sector
Commission**



Onboarding and inducting neurodivergent employees

Things you can do during onboarding and induction to support neurodivergent employees.

Creating a safe workplace

Victorian public sector employers must provide safe and respectful workplaces free from discrimination.

When neurodivergent employees don't feel safe being themselves, they may mask behaviours that would come naturally to them.

Masking is when a person tries to withhold or hide behaviours — consciously or not — that are part of their neurodivergence.

They may do this to feel accepted, fit in and avoid negative responses from others.

Masking takes a lot of mental and sometimes physical effort. For example, a neurodivergent employee may:

- force themselves to make eye contact with others even though this may be

something that causes them discomfort

- suppress stimming, a type of repetitive movement or sound that can help them regulate their attention, energy or emotions
- withhold ideas for fear of interrupting others or making verbal or written errors
- change their personality to be more like others in the workplace.

Masking is draining and can be detrimental to a neurodivergent person's mental health.

When an employee feels accepted for who they are, they're less likely to feel the need to mask.

If we make the workplace safe, neurodivergent employees will feel they have more of a choice to be open about who they are.

"The big thing that really holds me back from disclosing in the workplace is I'm really afraid of having my competence underestimated; that because I'm neurodivergent, my manager, employer or even colleagues, will make assumptions about how capable I am or what kind of tasks I'd be good at. They might think 'oh well she's autistic so we won't give her any tasks around working with people' but I actually think I'm very good with people in the workplace! To feel safe to disclose I'd need to feel like it was a safe environment where I can be sure my competence won't be assumed." – Neurodivergent employee

Benefits of a good induction

Starting in a new role or workplace can be hard. This is why you should provide a supportive environment for an employee from the start.

The quicker an employee can settle into their role, the quicker they can provide their expertise to the organisation.

A good induction supports new employees to understand:

- the rules of the workplace
- the 'norms' of the workplace or unspoken rules or expectations
- how the workplace functions
- the expectations of their role
- the facilities available to employees

- how they can request [workplace adjustments](#) if needed.

Before the first day

Predictability is important for many neurodivergent people. To help a new employee know what to expect, provide information about the workplace.

What to send

If relevant, send employees any:

- forms they need to fill out
- training or health checks they need to complete
- pre-reading they need to complete
- policies or guidelines about working onsite or from home.

If they need to send anything back to you, include information on how to do this and the due date.

It can be helpful for dyslexic employees if any forms or documents are in a format that allows text-to-speech. Or think if you can send a short video explaining the forms.

What to communicate

Before the first day, plan and tell new employees:

- where they should go on their first day
- if they can expect to meet someone to show them around.

You may also want to tell them:

- their start and end times for each day and if these are flexible, consistent or can change
- their break times and if these are flexible, consistent or can change
- how to clock in and out of work
- information about the working environment, such as if it's an open office, if it's indoors or outdoors, or if their work location will change week to week or day to day
- any uniform or attire requirements, particularly if these relate to occupational

health and safety

- any amenities they can access, such as if there is a fridge to bring lunch from home or shower and change facilities
- any steps they'll need to follow on their first day and week, such as if they need to create any accounts or if there is an induction
- information on parking for cars and bikes
- how to access any buildings
- the main systems and processes you use in your organisation and where to find information about these
- any 'unwritten' rules or norms in your team, branch or organisation they need to know about, such as those relating to communication, behaviour or attire.

It can also be helpful to check that key processes and documents (for example, the intranet) have text-to-speech functions.

"I recently moved to a temporary new office and was very anxious about the unwritten rules such as entering and exiting the building, where to set up, how to get there etc. Our Executive Director sent out detailed information about how to access the building, step by step on obtaining a security pass and information about booking meeting rooms. The branch was also given a copy of the floor plans of the floors we had access to – this was very reassuring and a great inclusive practice! It meant I could plan ahead about where I could sit which would avoid high traffic areas and lots of social activity and smells. The new environment was challenging enough but I felt less anxious with a plan for what to do when I got to the office." – Neurodivergent employee

What to ask

Before a new employee starts, consider asking:

- if they'd like to visit the workplace before their first day and/or talk with a manager or team member
- how they'd like you to introduce them to other people in the organisation, such as via email or in person and their preferred name
- if they need any [workplace adjustments](#) to support them in their role (and tell them how to ask for these once they start)
- what else they need from you before they start.

Asking questions like these can help new employees feel safe to approach you when they have questions.

In their first few days

The manager should:

- meet the new employee on their first day (or have another person from the team meet them and ensure this is someone who has enough time to answer questions)
- recap the information and advice shared with the employee before their first day
- give the new employee a tour of the workplace and its amenities including any empty rooms or flexible workspaces they can use if needed
- introduce the new employee to the team, key stakeholders and other contacts based on the method agreed with them before their first day
- ask if they'd like to meet other neurodivergent employees or connect with the Autism Success Network, [Enablers Network](#) or other [staff networks](#) during work hours (if you know they're neurodivergent)
- tell them how to contact and use any services they need such as human resources, IT support, meeting rooms and equipment
- tell them how to access workplace adjustments and other support services, such as the Employee Assistance Program
- discuss how the team usually communicates with one another and what format to prioritise, such as when to use phone, email or communication platforms like Microsoft Teams chats or channels.
- ask the employee about their needs and preferences and adjust the team's communication style where possible.

If you're aware the employee is neurodivergent, never introduce them as 'our new neurodivergent employee' or similar. It's up to the new employee to decide on what they want to share.

Never share the employee's neurodivergent identity with anyone without the employee's explicit permission.

Role clarity, tasks and collaboration

Role clarity is a key issue for neurodivergent employees.

Check if the employee feels their main responsibilities have been made clear to them

and if they have any questions about these.

Even if you feel that you've been clear in providing information about the role, check in with your employee again to ensure this.

In addition to this, a manager should:

- explain how the organisation measures success in the employee's role — this will help them know what you're looking for and how they can self-assess that they're meeting expectations
- make clear what tasks the employee needs to complete in the first days, weeks and months
- advise the employee about any required training, including the format, how to access it and when they must complete it by
- make sure the employee is informed about any policies and processes relevant to their role and who they can approach with questions
- advise the employee of any key people they should work with or any other work that intersects with theirs that they should be aware of.

Buddy person

As a new employee settles in, it can be helpful to assign a 'buddy' to whom they can ask questions.

This will help the new starter become comfortable in the organisation.

Also work out a secondary person for when their buddy isn't available.

Checking in at the end of each day

In their first week, the manager or buddy should check in with the new employee to:

- see how they're settling in
- check in on any expected progress relevant to their role
- ask what support they may need with any of their work including any workplace adjustments

Doing this in their first week will help the employee to understand their role, your expectations and how the organisation works.

You'll also learn more about them and their working style.

In the first month

Weekly check-in meetings and feedback

The manager should set up a weekly check-in with the new employee in the first month. This will help them know if they're doing well and will help make sure you know what they need.

This meeting lets both people discuss role progress, expectations and how their role fits into the organisation's structure and strategy.

Ensure your new employee is clear about how to work out which tasks are priorities and talk to them about their performance.

You could ask questions like:

- What is going well?
- What could be improved?
- What could be clarified?
- What questions do you have?

Feedback is important for neurodivergent employees so they know where they're doing well and if they need to make any adjustments. When you give feedback, ensure it's sincere, specific and framed constructively.

If they need help on how to improve, frame this as a problem-solving task for both of you, such as 'what are the barriers?' and 'what can we do to remove those?'

During this time, check in with your employee about sensory aspects of the work environment. For example, you could ask how the lighting is or if there is anything in the environment that makes them uncomfortable.

These types of discussions can lead to problem-solving and help you build trust. This may mean that if future issues arise, the employee will feel comfortable raising them with you.

Many adjustments have no or a low cost and are easy to make but have a big impact on job satisfaction.

"I asked if it was possible to reduce the level of light in my office. I didn't want to impact my office colleague by having a dark office, but found it hard to concentrate with the fluorescent lights turned on. The maintenance team were able to turn off a switch inside the lighting panel on my side of the office, so when the lights were on, they weren't as bright on my side of the office. This meant my colleague and I both had levels of lighting that worked for us. They also switched the bulbs for the office to yellow/warmer instead of white/cooler lighting, which we both preferred." – Neurodivergent employee

Handling communication

Some roles involve a lot of communication with or from many stakeholders across various sources.

It can be helpful to:

- talk with new employees about how and if you expect them to respond to different forms of communication — for example, there may be no need to respond if they're sent a group email or organisation-wide email.
- identify which stakeholders or channels they need to prioritise — for example, what emails do they need to prioritise replying to versus what can they look at when they have the time to do so?