The Manager Toolkit

Practical tools for leading neurodiverse teams

FOR PEOPLE MANAGERS · TEAM LEADS · HR PARTNERS

People on your team may process information, focus, and communicate in different ways. Use these questions, checklists, and examples to find out what helps each person work well. Many of the changes are simple and cost little or nothing.

Start here | 10 minutes

1. Read the five core practices (2 min).
2. Pick one row of the Translator that sounds like someone on your team; try the response this week.
3. Take the self-assessment at the end and choose your two fastest wins.

1 Five Core Practices

- **Design the work, don't diagnose the person.** When someone struggles, look first at how the work is structured.
- **Ask, don't assume.** A useful question is: “What works best for you?”
- **Put it in writing.** Keep written follow-ups brief, with clear actions and owners.
- **Give people time to prepare.** Advance notice, agendas, and stable routines reduce cognitive load.
- **Judge outcomes, not style.** Eye contact, fidgeting, and communication preferences are not performance metrics.

2 The Adjustment Menu (low/no-cost)

Category	Options to offer
Environment	Noise-canceling headphones · quiet workspace · lighting changes · remote/hybrid flexibility
Time	Flexible hours · protected focus blocks · extra time for written tasks · breaks between meetings
Communication	Written briefs · recorded meetings · advance notice of changes · agenda-first meetings
Task design	Chunked milestones · strength-matched work · assistive tech (text-to-speech, timers) · less context-switching

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3 Behavior to Need to Response Translator

What you might see	Possible need	Manager response
Misses details in long emails	Processes dense text differently	Bullets, bold key actions, offer a verbal summary
Quiet in meetings, avoids eye contact	Processing time; focus without eye contact	Agendas in advance; invite written input; don't cold-call
Interrupts or talks over people	Impulse control; fear of losing the thought	Structured turn-taking; suggest jotting ideas down
Asks many clarifying questions	Needs explicit, unambiguous instructions	Written briefs with clear success criteria
Headphones on, seeks quiet spots	Managing sensory overload	Normalize headphones; protect quiet zones
Strong reaction to last-minute change	Predictability is a cognitive need	Maximum notice; explain the why behind changes
Inconsistent output	Fluctuating energy/attention; masking	Discuss workload rhythm; front-load engaging work
Very direct feedback style	Literal communication, no social padding	Coach on impact privately; coach team to hear intent

4 Inclusive Meeting Checklist

☐ Agenda and pre-reads sent 24 hours ahead

☐ Purpose stated in the invite

☐ Async contribution option offered (shared doc, follow-up window)

☐ Cameras optional by default

☐ Decisions and owners documented and shared afterwards

☐ Honest check: could this meeting have been a document?

5 1:1 Conversation Starters (use with everyone)

- “What kind of work gives you energy? What drains you?”
- “How do you prefer to receive instructions: written, verbal, or both?”
- “What time of day is your best focus time?”
- “How do you like to receive feedback?”
- “What's one thing about our team's way of working you'd change?”

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6 When Someone Discloses: the 6-Step Flow

1. Thank them for the trust.
2. Ask what works best for them.
3. Agree one or two immediate changes.
4. Confirm confidentiality. Sharing requires their explicit consent.
5. Route formal needs to HR / occupational health.
6. **Follow up within one week.** Check whether the agreed changes are helping.

RESPONDING TO DISCLOSURE

"Thank you for telling me. What is working well, and what would you like to change? Let's agree on a first step and check how it goes."

RAISING A CONCERN WITHOUT PRESSURE

"How is the current setup working for you? Is there anything about the workload, communication, or environment that we could change to help?"

7 Manager Self-Assessment (repeat quarterly)

☐ My team receives clear, written expectations for every significant task

☐ My meetings have agendas and async contribution options

☐ I know each team member's preferred working and communication style

☐ People openly use adjustments (headphones, flexible hours) without stigma

☐ I could respond confidently and correctly to a disclosure tomorrow

☐ I evaluate performance on outcomes, not communication style

Choose your next step: Tick what you already do consistently. Choose two unticked items to work on this quarter. If you are unsure where to start, try written briefs and meeting agendas.

My two fastest wins this quarter:

Go further: the Behavior Translator (sharedlanguage.org/translator), the free Manager Essentials training with certificate (sharedlanguage.org/training), and the Organizations toolkit for rolling this out org-wide.

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