

FOR PEOPLE MANAGERS · TEAM LEADS · HR PARTNERS

The Manager Toolkit

Practical tools for leading neurodiverse teams

About one in five people thinks, processes, and communicates differently. The teams that benefit from that are the ones whose managers design for it. Everything here is low-cost, label-free, and better for the whole team — not just neurodivergent members.

In this toolkit: 1 Golden rules · 2 Translator · 3 Meeting checklist · 4 1:1 starters · 5 Adjustment menu · 6 Disclosure flow · 7 Self-assessment

START HERE · 10 MINUTES

1. Read the 5 Golden Rules (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 The 5 Golden Rules

- **Design the work, don't diagnose the person.** When someone struggles, look first at how the work is structured.
- **Ask, don't assume.** The single best question a manager can ask: "What works best for you?"
- **Put it in writing.** Clear, brief, explicit — written follow-ups help everyone.
- **Predictability is a productivity tool.** Advance notice, agendas, and stable routines reduce cognitive load.
- **Judge outcomes, not style.** Eye contact, fidgeting, and communication preferences are not performance metrics.

2 Behavior → Need → Response Translator

Observe behavior. Respond to needs. Never speculate about causes or labels. (The interactive version lives at sharedlanguage.org.)

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

What you might see	Possible need	Manager response
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

3 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?

4 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?"

5 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

6 When Someone Discloses: the 6-Step Flow

1. Thank them for the trust.
2. Ask what works best for them — don't guess.
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.** Broken promises after disclosure are devastating.

SCRIPT — RESPONDING TO DISCLOSURE

"Thank you for sharing that with me. I want to make sure work is set up so you can do your best. What's working well right now, and what would you change if you could? We can start small and adjust as we go."

SCRIPT — RAISING A CONCERN WITHOUT PRESSURE

"I want to check in on how the current setup is working for you — workload, communication, environment, anything. My goal is to remove obstacles, not to criticize."

7 Manager Self-Assessment (repeat quarterly)

Rate yourself 1–5 on each statement:

- ☐ 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

Score 24+: strong foundation — keep iterating. **18–23:** embed two new practices this month. **Below 18:** start with written briefs and meeting agendas — fastest wins.

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.

Shared Language provides management and educational guidance, not medical, psychological, or legal advice. Formal accommodations should follow local law and involve HR, occupational health, or disability services. Possibilities, not diagnoses.