



Building inclusive policies: a guide for HR leaders (June 2025)

Creating inclusive workplaces is great for business. Retention improves, innovation flourishes, and teams perform better when everyone feels supported (including neurodivergent individuals).

But here's the catch. While diversity and inclusion strategies have come a long way, neurodivergence is still too often left off the table. And without clear, inclusive policies, even the best intentions can fall flat. Which can leave people feeling unsure where they stand or how to get the support they need.

If you're an HR leader, head of diversity, or talent acquisition manager looking to create policies that better support people with neurodivergent experiences, we hope this article gives you a helpful starting point.

Why neurodivergent inclusion should be written into your policies

Neurodivergence includes forms such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, Tourette's, and more. In every workforce, there are already people who think and work in these ways and too often they're navigating environments that weren't built with them in mind.

The business case is clear: research shows that teams including people with diverse ways of thinking are better at problem-solving, spotting patterns and driving innovation. But inclusion doesn't happen by accident, it needs to be built into your HR policies from the ground up.

Think about where people with neurodivergent experiences often face barriers:

- Recruitment processes that favour eye contact and rapid-fire interviews.
- Workplaces that are noisy, bright and overwhelming.
- Lack of adjustments, or unclear/complicated processes for requesting them.
- High stress and burnout rates when mental health isn't supported.
- Your policies can either remove those barriers... or quietly reinforce them.

Start with awareness and language that includes everyone

First things first. Your policies should use inclusive, respectful language. Ditch deficit-based phrases like "disorders", "conditions" or "impairments" and focus on adjustments, strengths and support. Small changes in wording can make a big difference to whether people with neurodivergent experiences feel seen or sidelined.

Bonus tip: Involve people with lived experience of neurodivergence in reviewing your policies. If you're not sure whether your wording is inclusive, ask them to tell you.



Make workplace adjustments easy and obvious

Think beyond aircon and ergonomic chairs. Adjustments that can make a real difference include:

- **Noise-cancelling headphones** or sound-dampening panels to reduce auditory overload.
- **Flexible hours or remote working** to avoid peak travel times and manage energy levels.
- **Alternative formats for interviews** or meetings, such as written responses instead of verbal, or providing questions in advance.
- **Quiet, low-stimulation spaces** where people can go to decompress during the day.
- **Zones with a different temperature** and lighting so people who run warm, feel the cold, or are sensitive to harsh lighting can choose where they feel most comfortable.
- **Clear, written instructions** alongside verbal requests to support different processing styles.
- **Opt-out options for social or team-building events** without stigma, recognising that not everyone finds large gatherings energising.

The key thing is to make sure these adjustments are visible and easy to request. Don't hide them in HR handbooks that hardly anyone reads.

Add an 'adjustments request process' to your employee onboarding. Share it during performance reviews. Above all, make it clear that adjustments are there for anyone who needs them, without stigma.

Mental health support isn't optional, it's essential

Many people with neurodivergent experiences face higher rates of anxiety, stress and burnout. That's not because they're less resilient, it's because most workplaces aren't set up to reduce overwhelm and support different ways of working.

Your policies should go beyond the basics and clearly include mental health accommodations, such as:

- **Flexibility around breaks during the day** – such as optional short, frequent breaks to manage energy, rather than the usual single lunch break.
- **Flexibility around deadlines and meeting attendance** when someone is experiencing burnout or recovery from overwhelm.
- **Providing advance notice for meetings and changes** – last-minute shifts can spike anxiety and make self-regulation harder.



- **Access to quieter, low-pressure spaces during the workday** — not just break rooms, but real restorative environments.
- **Choice around communication channels** — some people may need to switch off instant messaging or avoid video calls during periods of stress.
- **Partnering with mental health providers who understand neurodivergence** — and making sure your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is truly inclusive and relevant, not just a generic helpline.

Employee resource groups (ERGs) can drive real change

Policies are powerful, but culture makes them stick. That's where networks and ERGs for people with neurodivergent experiences come in.

Encourage the formation of an ERG focused on neurodivergence, back it up with funding and senior sponsorship and allow participants to block out time for it. Don't leave it as an unpaid side project for volunteers that has to be squeezed in when workloads allow.

These groups can:

- Test new policies and give lived-experience feedback.
- Build community and peer support.
- Help raise awareness across your organisation.

Bonus tip: Make sure ERGs are empowered to influence decision-making, not just run events.



Practical steps to make your policies inclusive from day one

Not sure where to start? Here's a step-by-step guide:

1. Audit your existing policies

Check where the needs of people with neurodivergent experiences are missing — in recruitment, onboarding, progression, and flexible working policies.

2. Involve neurodivergent voices

Co-create updates with staff or external partners like Aabilities. Policies written with people, not about them, are more likely to resonate and be embraced.

3. Train your managers

Policy is only effective when line managers understand and apply it consistently. Build neurodivergent inclusion into manager training.

4. Communicate clearly

Roll out updates in plain language. Use multiple formats - video, intranet posts, team briefings - so everyone gets the message in the way that works for them.

5. Measure and refine

Track adjustment requests, retention rates and employee feedback. Inclusion isn't 'one-and-done', it evolves. It pays to keep an eye.



Inclusive policies build inclusive cultures

When you build neurodivergence into your policies, you send a clear message: everyone belongs here. That's good for employee morale and good for your employer branding.

And the benefits ripple out further:

Better employee retention, lower turnover.

More engaged and productive teams.

A stronger brand reputation for inclusion.

A workplace where everyone can be their best.

Small changes in policy can unlock big shifts in culture and business performance.