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## **HELPING NEURODIVERSE MEMBERS – IDENTIFICATION, DISCLOSURE & ADJUSTMENTS**

As we have stated elsewhere in the guidance, because people have built up coping strategies throughout their lives, they may not be aware that they have a neurodiverse condition. Challenges may arise unexpectedly (for them) where there have been changes in structures or procedures, for example, or where performance is assessed much more stringently due to changes in the system or a new line manager.

We have explained in these pages some of the characteristics of neurodiverse conditions which we hope will help representatives if they are struggling to understand their colleagues' behaviours.

If you suspect that a colleague may have a neurodiverse condition and they haven't disclosed this to you, it is likely that they don't know themselves. Situations such as these should be handled sensitively.

There are some straightforward screening tests available online (see Links section) and whilst they are not intended to be used as diagnostic tests, they may indicate whether there could be a neurodiverse condition which will then require a full professional assessment. However quite a few Prospect members with neurodiverse conditions will be of 'high ability' and have learnt to compensate for many of their challenges. This can sometimes mean that the screening checklists do not identify someone who is, for instance, dyslexic when in fact they are. So if some of the characteristics associated with a neurodiverse condition are clearly evident then it may be advisable to seek advice from a professional, preferably one specialising in adults in the workplace. Some of the organisations listed in our links & resources section [[insert link](#)] are willing to provide initial advice free-of-charge, (e.g. Independent Dyslexia Consultants).

Detailed advice on identification, disclosure (including risks and benefits), and obtaining diagnostic and workplace needs assessments can be found in the TUC guidance on Dyslexia in the Workplace [[insert link](#)] – many of the principles will apply for other neurodiverse conditions too.

Professional assessments can be expensive and so where appropriate reps should try to persuade the member to disclose their likelihood of a neurodiverse condition in order to encourage the employer to pay for the diagnostic assessment. This may be a reasonable adjustment that the employer can provide.

You can explain to the member that if the assessment reveals there is a neurodiverse condition then they should be protected from discrimination and less favourable treatment under the Equality Act. In addition, the employer is obliged to make reasonable adjustments for them to be able to carry out their job effectively. See our page on What a good manager would do [insert link] for examples of reasonable adjustments.

It is therefore likely to be in members' interests to disclose their condition to the employer, explaining their strengths and difficulties, (even if they already know they have a neurodiverse condition and have not yet disclosed this to the employer).

Members may understandably feel nervous or stressed at the idea of having a professional assessment, but it may help to reassure them that the differences and difficulties that they have been experiencing for some time would be explained, and as such there would be a recognition that adjustments would need to be made for them. A reassurance would also help because their report following the assessment should be treated as confidential, with only very few individuals within the organisation having access to it (a member of HR, the trade union rep, line manager and perhaps a senior manager).

Once a professional diagnostic assessment has taken place, then this should be followed up with a workplace needs assessment which should look in detail at the member's job and how they can be supported through reasonable adjustments. Neurodiverse Prospect members are likely to have many skills and an approach that can benefit everyone is to make adjustments that allow them to utilise and develop their skills to maximise contribution and not to concentrate unduly on their challenges. Reasonable adjustments can include changing standard working practices or job responsibilities to facilitate this.

See also our webpages for further information: <https://www.prospect.org.uk/at-work/neurodiversity>

Remember that members with some neurodiverse conditions may have difficulties with social interaction, interpersonal skills and non-verbal communications so bear in mind the following points when dealing with personal cases - these points will generally help with most of the personal cases that you deal with, but particularly for neurodiverse members:

- members experience stress and anxiety in different ways and these are usually heightened during times of uncertainty such as dealing with their own personal case. Be aware that such times may exacerbate the member's neurodiverse condition and their coping strategies may break down.
- because of possible sensitivity to noise, smells, light etc choose a quiet and comfortable venue for meetings/interviews
- in some circumstances it may be appropriate to allow the member to invite a friend, colleague or a member of their family to accompany them to meetings/interviews
- try to ensure there is structure and routine when dealing with your member's case, if possible give them timetables and dates for responses
- be clear, concise and direct with your advice and guidance, which you may need to repeat from time to time
- follow-up meetings and telephone calls in writing

- ask the member what format for written communications is best for them, e.g. emails, different coloured paper, font size
- keep in touch - just a short phone call for reassurance purposes may suffice.

Also be aware that some neurodiverse members may:

- interpret information literally, or misinterpret what you tell them
- pay close attention to details over facts, paperwork etc
- miss deadlines for responses to requests for information
- need to be closely involved in the case, for example there may be flurries of emails or phone calls about their case
- conversely, they may appear to lack interest in their case.

### **How to help neurodiverse members....**

Be proactive in creating inclusive work environments e.g. distributing accurate information about neurodiversity, negotiating for improvements in policy and practice and publicising support for neurodiverse employees.

Liaise with line managers/HR as necessary e.g. to secure diagnostic and workplace needs assessments, in consultation with the member.

Follow up on assessments e.g. to secure further action and timely implementation of adjustments.

Challenge misunderstandings and negative stereotypes.