



The union for financial professionals.
Le syndicat des professionnels de la finance.

Thinking Differently at Work

Guide for Neurodivergent Employees

ACFO-ACAF 2025



Contents

Background to Thinking Differently at Work	3
An Introduction to Neurodiversity	5
1. What is Neurodiversity?.....	5
2. Why Does It Matter?.....	8
3. ADHD at Work.....	10
4. Dyslexia at Work.....	12
5. Autism at Work.....	15
6. Other Aspects of Difference.....	17
7. Intersectionality with Mental Health.....	20
From Diagnosis to Workplace Disclosure	23
1. How to Get Diagnosed.....	23
2. Disclosing a Neurodivergent Condition.....	26
Navigating Workplace Accommodations	30
1. Understanding the Duty to Accommodate.....	30
2. Requesting Accommodation: Roles and Responsibilities.....	32
3. ADHD Accommodations and Adaptations.....	34
4. Dyslexia Accommodations and Adaptations.....	37
5. Autism Accommodations and Adaptations.....	40
Leveraging Professional Development for Neurodivergent Career Growth	44
Appendix A – Summary of Strategies for Supporting Neurodivergent Employees	51
Appendix B – Glossary of Terms	52
Appendix C – External Organizations and More Information	54
Appendix D – Functional Abilities Forms	56
Appendix E – Endnotes	57

Background to Thinking Differently at Work

About ACFO-ACAF and our members

As North America's largest union representing accountants, comptrollers, auditors, and financial professionals, ACFO-ACAF proudly advocates for 7,000+ members across 70+ departments within the Canadian federal public service and at NAV Canada.

Among these members are neurodivergent individuals. Common forms of neurodivergence include dyspraxia, dyslexia, Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), the autism spectrum, and more. We are deeply committed to supporting them, having witnessed firsthand the impact of discrimination, stigma, loss of confidence, alienation, and psychological and financial hardship of employees who are neurodivergent. These barriers can hinder employees' ability to thrive professionally, highlighting the need for targeted support and advocacy.

In response, this document was developed by a diverse team of neurodivergent authors, subject matter experts, and allies. It serves as both a comprehensive resource and a practical advocacy tool. By offering strategies for navigating the workplace, this guide empowers neurodivergent employees to better understand their rights, seek out needed assessments, access accommodations, and advocate for inclusive environments.

The scope of this document

This guide is designed to support neurodivergent employees at every stage of their employment journey. While it doesn't delve into specific conditions in detail, it offers practical guidance for neurodivergent employees to navigate the workplace while requesting necessary supports and fostering inclusive environments.

Accessibility

We have made this document accessible for a neurodiverse audience. If you require this Guide in an alternative format, please contact us at info@acfo-acaf.com or call 1-877-728-0695. We will make every reasonable effort to meet your needs.

Acknowledgments

Special thanks to our contributors:

- Autism Canada
- Danielle Lafleur, Labour Relations Advisor, ACFO-ACAF
- Dyslexia Canada
- Dr. Gurdeep Parhar, Co-Founder of Adult ADHD Centre
- GMB Union
- Dr. Jennifer Fane, Lead Research Associate, Conference Board of Canada
- Lauren Doty, Director of Communications & Member Engagement, ACFO-ACAF
- Matthew Létourneau, Labour Relations Advisor, ACFO-ACAF
- Megan Walter, Learning & Development Specialist, ACFO-ACAF
- Stéphanie Rochon Perras, Director of Job Evaluation and Equity, ACFO-ACAF
- Wanda K. Deschamps, Founder and Principal, Liberty Co

We extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who contributed to the creation of this guide. Your dedication, insight, and collaboration have made this resource possible, and together, we are taking a vital step toward creating a more inclusive and equitable workplace for all.

Rob Hawkins

President
ACFO-ACAF

An Introduction to Neurodiversity

1. What is Neurodiversity?

Authored by Dr. Jennifer Fane, Lead Research Associate, Conference Board of Canada¹

Neurodiversity is the idea that the human brain functions in different ways and that these differences are natural. It's a framework for understanding how people's brains process information, learn, and behave.

People who are neurodivergent have brains that work differently from the average (or "neurotypical") person. This can include differences in how they learn, communicate, perceive the environment, or their social preferences.

The neurodiversity movement aims to increase awareness and acceptance of the natural and valuable variations in the ways that people think, understand information, communicate, and learn. While neurodiversity's roots began in the autistic community, it has grown to become an umbrella term to capture a range of identities and diagnoses, including, but not limited to:

- Autism spectrum disorder (ASD);
- Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD);
- Learning disabilities such as:
 - Dyslexia;
 - Dyscalculia;
 - Dysgraphia;
- Developmental coordination disorder;
- Sensory processing differences;
- Tourette syndrome;
- Acquired brain injury (ABI); and

¹ *Dr. Jennifer Fane is an educational researcher and holds an interdisciplinary doctorate in education, social policy and public health. She is intensely thankful for her "village" that has taught her more about learning and inclusion than any of her degrees could have.*



- Certain mental health conditions, such as:
 - Anxiety;
 - Depression; and
 - Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD).

You may find a full definition for each of these in the glossary of terms (Appendix B).

Most neurodivergent identities and diagnoses are non-visible, which often results in neurodivergent individuals experiencing higher levels of negative stigma compared to individuals with physical or visible disabilities or impairments.ⁱ

Using a neurodiversity lens, individuals with these identities and/or diagnoses are understood to be neurodivergent, having different experiences, strengths, preferences and challenges compared to neurotypical individuals. Despite commonalities between neurodivergent individuals and their experiences, it is important to understand that not all neurodivergent individuals present the same way or have the same support needs.

The neurodiversity movement

The neurodiversity movement emerged in the late 1990s from an online community of autistic advocates and was first explored from a scholarly and research lens by sociologist Judy Singer in 1998.ⁱⁱ Previously, research on neurodevelopmental disorders like autism spectrum disorder (ASD), learning disabilities, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) focused on the difficulties and deficits of individuals compared to their typically developing peers.

People of all neurotypes (both neurodivergent and neurotypical) have unique strengths and face challenges in their daily lives. However, neurodivergent individuals encounter increased barriers to accessing and navigating systems and institutions like schools, workplaces, and healthcare because these systems have been designed around the needs and preferences of neurotypical people.

The neurodiversity movement aims to highlight the importance of creating neuroinclusive environments that improve accessibility and inclusion for everyone, regardless of neurotype.



Key takeaways

- **What is neurodiversity?:** Neurodiversity acknowledges natural brain differences in learning, communication, and behaviour, including autism, ADHD, and learning disabilities.
- **Challenges:** Non-visible conditions often lead to stigma and barriers in systems designed for neurotypical people.
- **Movement goals:** The neurodiversity movement promotes awareness, acceptance, and neuroinclusive environments for all.

2. Why Does It Matter?

Authored by Lauren Doty, Director of Communications & Member Engagement at ACFO-ACAF²

Even as the world becomes more familiar with conditions like autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), one can have an image in their head of what neurodivergence looks like. In reality, it's impossible to pinpoint exactly what neurodivergence looks when it applies to an estimated 15-20% of the population according to the Conference Board of Canada and doesn't discriminate by race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation.



Strengths in thinking differently

In addition, with terminology like “disorders”, one can also default to thinking about how neurodivergent professionals might struggle at work. While they can certainly have struggles in the workplace like anybody else, with the right support and accommodations (if necessary), neurodivergent CTs can thrive at work, just like neurotypical CTs and bring unique strengths and perspectives to their work that can benefit everyone.

Important facts

- Neurodivergence isn't new.
- Most neurodivergent individuals support themselves and have independent lives.
- Each neurodivergent individual has different support needs.
- Teams with neurodiversity can be 30% more productive than teams without themⁱⁱⁱ

Embracing and supporting neurodiversity is essential for creating a society that values your unique strengths and perspectives, empowering you to thrive and contribute fully to your communities and workplaces.

² *Lauren Doty (she/her) is a Person with ADHD and has worked at ACFO-ACAF since 2015. She is a certified emotional intelligence instructor, Associate Coach (ACC), and holds a bachelor's degree from Carleton University in Communication Studies.*

By recognizing the importance of your neurodivergent experiences, we can foster environments that not only accommodate but celebrate your individuality, ensuring that you feel accepted, understood, and empowered to pursue your passions and goals.

Your voice matters, and together, we can build a more inclusive world that appreciates the richness that neurodiversity brings to our lives.

Key takeaways

- **Understanding neurodivergence:** Neurodivergence affects 15-20% of the population and spans all demographics, challenging stereotypes about how it “looks.”
- **Unique strengths:** With proper support, neurodivergent individuals thrive in workplaces, bringing diverse strengths that can boost team productivity by 30%.
- **Importance of inclusion:** Embracing neurodiversity fosters acceptance, celebrates individuality, and builds a more inclusive society where everyone can thrive.



3. ADHD at Work

Authored by the Adult ADHD Centre³

Understanding Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

ADHD is not a rare condition; the prevalence worldwide is about 5%. That means for every 1000 employees, 50 individuals likely have ADHD (diagnosed or undiagnosed).

ADHD is a scientifically recognized neurodevelopmental disorder, meaning it originates from differences in brain structure and function. These differences affect how a person's brain manages attention, impulse, and hyperactivity. ADHD is not a result of laziness or a character flaw; it is a medical condition that influences how the brain processes information and controls behaviour. People with ADHD have brains that work differently, and with the right support, they can thrive.

ADHD is more than attention and distraction challenges; it is a disorder of self-regulation and executive function. Executive function controls how we manage time, pay attention, change focus, plan, organize, and regulate emotions. ADHD is more about an abundance of attention and the challenge is controlling it.

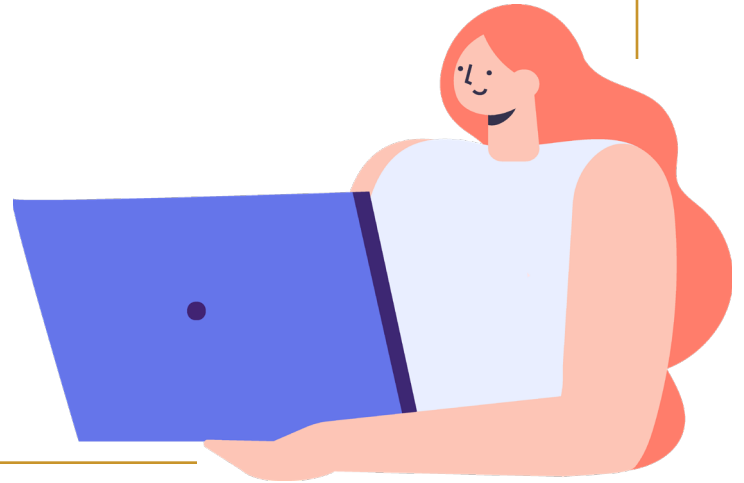
The impact of ADHD can be seen in school, work, relationships, and daily functioning. Below are some common symptoms of ADHD and how these may present in the workplace.



³ *The Adult ADHD Centre is an advocate for workplace inclusivity and providing ADHD assessments across Canada.*

Common Symptoms of ADHD

- Fails to give attention to detail
- Distracted by extraneous stimuli
- Overly active/fidgets
- Difficulty with follow-through
- Not listening when spoken to
- Difficulty sustaining attention
- Talks a lot or interrupts others
- Impatient/impulsive



ADHD Impact at Work

- Creative problem solving
- Strong intuition
- Resourceful
- Energy and enthusiasm
- Hyperfocus
- Adaptability; fast-paced settings
- Curious learner
- Resilience/Perseverance
- Poor time management
- Disorganized, unfinished projects
- Impulsive comments
- Failure to meet deadlines
- Difficulty delegating tasks
- Low frustration tolerance
- Forgetful or unprepared
- Restlessness
- Difficulty with paperwork
- Overlooks or misses details
- Difficulty following instructions
- Inconsistent



4. Dyslexia at Work

By *Dyslexia Canada*⁴

Individuals with dyslexia have a reputation for being creative and with good memories but may struggle with tasks that require significant reading and writing. With proper support, individuals with dyslexia can thrive.

Difficulties with reading, writing, or processing information can be mitigated through accommodations like assistive technology, flexible deadlines, and clear communication. Fostering an inclusive environment where employees feel comfortable sharing their needs ensures they can fully contribute to the team.



What is dyslexia?

Before talking about the changes and help someone with dyslexia might need, it's important to first explain what dyslexia is. The International Dyslexia Association defines dyslexia as:

“...a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.”^{iv}

Coworkers can misconstrue the performance of individuals with dyslexia, perceiving them as being “slow learners,” “just needing a little more time,” “unmotivated,” or “lazy.” Far from this perception, dyslexic individuals are often great employees who simply may require supports for reading and writing tasks.

⁴ By *Tianna Voort, Community Outreach Coordinator and Philip Hicks, a Person with dyslexia and Outreach Volunteer at Dyslexia Canada.*

Characteristics may include:

- Reading slowly, often confusing, mispronouncing or skipping common words
- Struggling with math word problems
- Writing slowly and laboriously
- Decoding and pronouncing unfamiliar words like the names of people or places incorrectly
- Having trouble learning another language
- Writing with difficulty, including issues with spelling, grammar, and organizing thoughts
- Avoiding tasks or pursuits that require reading and writing



Dyslexia is often misunderstood as seeing words or letters backwards, leading to stigma. Many people with dyslexia are highly intelligent but may struggle to express their ideas in writing, causing frustration. Educating others about dyslexia helps create a supportive work environment where employees can reach their full potential.

How can it show up at work?

Depending on an individual's strengths and weaknesses, dyslexia can show up in many ways. People with dyslexia often experience difficulties with tasks related to reading and writing.

These can include:

- Reading lengthy texts, especially texts with a lot of complex vocabulary
- Slow reading speed
- Writing texts to present their ideas
- Taking meeting notes
- Confusing similar-sounding words
- Difficulty expressing their feelings or thoughts verbally or in written format
- Difficulty transcribing information from secondary sources
- Learning additional languages

Dyslexia is also comorbid with other learning disabilities such as ADHD, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia.

It's important to be mindful that people with dyslexia may:

- Isolate themselves
- Avoid team participation due to fear around how they can contribute
- Have issues with self-esteem
- Be very good at masking their struggles so it can be hard to spot if they are struggling

5. Autism at Work

Authored by Lauren Doty, Director of Communications and Member Engagement, ACFO-ACAF, with files from Autism Canada

What is autism?

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD), or autism, is a neurodevelopmental disorder that impacts brain development. The result is that most individuals experience:

- Communication problems;
- Difficulty with social interactions;
- A tendency to repeat specific patterns of behaviour; and
- A markedly restricted range of activities and interests.

The term “spectrum” refers to a range or continuum of severity or of developmental impairment.

Children and adults with ASDs may have particular characteristics in common but the condition covers a wide spectrum, with individual differences in the following:

- Number and particular kinds of symptoms;
- Severity: Mild to severe;
- Age of onset;
- Levels of functioning; and
- Challenges with social interactions.

According to the National ASD Surveillance System 2018 report, [Autism Prevalence among Children and Youth in Canada](#), an estimated 1 in 54 children and youth between 5 and 17 years of age have been diagnosed with ASD.



Autism in the workplace

Autistic professionals can be up to 140% more productive than the typical employee when properly matched to jobs^v. While we should not generalize such results to the entire population, research shows that professionals on the autism spectrum bring valuable strengths to the workplace, including (but not limited to):

- Understanding complex systems;
- Independently focusing on tasks;
- Reliability; and
- Loyalty.

Despite this, systemic problems and discrimination still exist for professionals with ASD. For example, the job interview process highly favours neurotypicality, thus leaving individuals with ASD feeling pressured to appear as non-autistic as possible, or to “mask”, in order to obtain or maintain a job. Long-term exposure to masking behaviours and discrimination can lead to burnout, illness, and job loss^{vi}.





6. Other Aspects of Difference

Authored by Wanda K. Deschamps, Founder and Principal, Liberty Co⁵

Neurodiversity touches every corner of humanity across races, ethnicities, genders, religions, and sexual orientations. Yet, much of the research has taken a male-centric approach.

Example: Leo Kanner's 1943 study at Johns Hopkins University, a cornerstone in autism research, focused on 11 children – eight boys and three girls. This narrow lens has helped shape the portrayal of neurodiversity, especially autism, as a male condition in popular culture, from Raymond in Rain Man to Sheldon Cooper in The Big Bang Theory.

Men

A male-centric approach also skews diagnoses. Screening tools can miss autism and other neurodivergent conditions in girls and women because they're designed based on studies of boys. As a result, autism is diagnosed four to five times more often in boys than in girls, leaving many girls and women without the support and understanding they need to thrive. This gender bias in diagnosis perpetuates harmful stereotypes and prevents many from receiving timely support.

Women

Neurodivergent women face a double challenge – grappling with both sexism and the social penalties for traits like directness and practicality, which are often seen as male characteristics. This deepens misunderstandings and discrimination, further complicated by ongoing underdiagnosis and biases.

⁵ Wanda Deschamps is an openly autistic founder of Liberty Co – a consultancy focused on neurodiverse employment.

Race

Racial disparities add another layer to the problem. Black, Indigenous, and other racialized populations experience limited access to healthcare more often than white populations, leading to underdiagnosis and a distorted view of neurodiversity. Historically, research dominated by a white, male, and Western lens has traditionally painted neurodivergence negatively, focusing on deficits rather than strengths and contributions.

Gender diversity

Neurodivergent individuals, particularly those with autism, also frequently display higher rates of gender diversity and non-conformity, challenging traditional norms. While this diversity is a strength, it can also create barriers to full participation in society, leading to further marginalization and exclusion.

Mental health

Because of these and other factors, neurodivergent individuals are more likely to experience co-occurring conditions such as anxiety, depression, and PTSD.

For instance, up to 61% of the autistic population may show signs of PTSD, making them vulnerable to bullying, harassment, and social isolation, putting them at higher risk of suicidal thoughts and actions.

However, the tide is turning

We're beginning to see recognition of the experiences of women, racialized individuals, and the many other aspects of difference and how they intersect with neurodiversity. So, we must continue to challenge outdated stereotypes and push for inclusive workplaces that recognize the full spectrum of neurodiversity. By doing so, we can create a society where everyone, including those neurodivergent individuals, can thrive.



Key takeaways

- **Educate and advocate for workplace change:** Continuously learn about neurodiversity and its intersections with gender, race, and mental health. Get involved in workplace committees or advocacy groups to represent neurodivergent perspectives and drive positive change.
- **Challenge stereotypes and support diverse representation:** Actively correct misconceptions about neurodivergence, especially those that suggest it primarily affects certain groups. Be a mentor or champion for underrepresented voices and foster an inclusive culture.
- **Prioritize self-care and well-being:** Engaging in self-care is essential for maintaining your well-being, which in turn enables you to contribute more effectively in advocating for neurodivergent needs and fostering a supportive workplace.
- **Recognize and embrace your added value:** Your neurodivergence and any intersectionality provides a unique perspective to your work and your colleagues. Whether it's your attention to detail, deep focus abilities, creativity, and more, find ways to add value to your workplace through your neurodiversity.





7. Intersectionality with Mental Health

Authored by Danielle Lafleur, H.B. Com, LL.B.⁶

This section explores the intersection of neurodivergence and mental health, focusing on strategies for workplace support and accommodation.

Mental health challenges can affect anyone, not just neurodivergent individuals. Forms of neurodivergence – such as autism, Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and dyslexia – are distinct from mental health conditions but increase vulnerability to mental health issues.

Quick facts

- Neurodivergent individuals are more likely to experience anxiety and depression
- 50% of adults with ADHD and 47% of adults with autism report co-occurring anxiety disorders
- 70% of those with ADHD and 40% of those with autism face depression^{vii}

Key contributing factors^{viii}

- **Emotional Regulation:** Neurodivergent conditions can disrupt mood regulation, increasing vulnerability to mental health issues.
- **Social Integration:** Struggles with fitting in can erode self-esteem and contribute to depression.
- **Masking:** The effort to conceal neurodivergence can be exhausting and strain mental health.
- **Workplace Stress:** Incompatible work environments can lead to overstimulation, difficulty with social cues, and pressure to conform to neurotypical standards.
- **Discrimination and Stigma:** Experiences of stigma, combined with limited resources for coping, exacerbate mental health challenges.

⁶ Danielle Lafleur is a Job Content, Classification and Equity Advisor with ACFO-ACAF. She has spent 15 years helping members address and resolve their work-related issues and concerns. Prior to joining ACFO-ACAF, Danielle articulated at Borden Ladner Gervais LLP and holds a law degree from the University of Ottawa and a degree in commerce from Laurentian University. Danielle is also a certified emotional intelligence facilitator and coach, and she has developed and delivered courses on workplace conflict and ethics.

Impact of workplace environments

Workplaces are typically designed with neurotypical employees in mind, which can create significant barriers for neurodivergent individuals. Factors like office layout, lighting, and management styles may not accommodate neurodivergent needs, leading to increased stress and burnout. This highlights the need for more inclusive workplace practices.

Strategies for support and accommodation

Listening to neurodivergent employees' needs can result in identifying opportunities to modify the workplace environment to improve mental health for everyone. Addressing mental health risks associated with neurodivergence include unique strategies for neurodivergence when sharing cognitive mental health supports.

Modifying the Workplace Environment

Remove Obstacles: Adapt office layouts and minimize noise to create an inclusive space. Consider flexible work arrangements.

Stigma Reduction: Encourage open discussions about mental health to foster understanding and reduce stigma.

Training and Resources: Provide training for managers on neurodivergent challenges and ensure access to mental health benefits.

Accommodations: Implement measures like paid mental health days and flexible scheduling.^{ix}

Supporting Individual Well-being

Cognitive Strategies: Equip neurodivergent employees with tools to manage unhelpful thinking patterns.

Physical Health: Promote regular movement, a balanced diet, and hydration for overall well-being.

Sleep Hygiene: Encourage good sleep practices to support mental health.

Community and Belonging: Foster connections with supportive communities and resources to enhance belonging.^x

Resources and support

Four different types of resources are available to support mental health and neurodivergent needs:

- **Training Programs:** Offered through the Joint Career Development Program (JCDDP), Canada School of Public Service, Mental Health Commission of Canada, Canadian Centre of Occupational Health and Safety, Centre of Expertise on Mental Health in the Workplace, and Departmental Initiatives.
- **Workplace Support:** Includes managers, colleagues, mentors, departmental ombudsmen, mental health champions, health and safety representatives, peer support groups, employee assistance programs, informal conflict management system, and various forms of leave options.

- **Labour Relations:** For workplace issues and negotiations, employees can contact the ACFO-ACAF labour relations team at labourrelations@acfo-acaf.com.
- **Psychological Services:** Recent increases in mental health benefits for public service employees (\$5000/year per employee) allow access to psychologists, social workers, and counselors without a prescription.

Key takeaways

- **Neurodivergence and mental health:** Neurodivergent individuals face heightened risks of anxiety and depression due to factors like emotional regulation challenges, workplace stress, and societal stigma.
- **Workplace impact:** Traditional work environments often exacerbate mental health issues for neurodivergent employees, underscoring the need for inclusive practices, such as flexible arrangements and stigma reduction.
- **Support strategies:** Key approaches include adapting workplace environments, offering mental health resources, promoting physical and emotional well-being, and fostering community connections to empower neurodivergent employees.



From Diagnosis to Workplace Disclosure

1. How to Get Diagnosed



Authored by the Adult ADHD Centre⁷

When seeking a diagnosis for any condition, it is important to identify goals to help guide the process. As a starting point, it is best to begin the conversation with a primary care provider such as a physician, nurse practitioner, or psychotherapist/counsellor. They can provide guidance through the process, recommend the next course of action, and help set reasonable expectations.

When meeting with the practitioner, it is helpful to list questions that need to be addressed.

Dyslexia diagnosis for adults

Dyslexia can only be diagnosed by a qualified psychologist. The psychologist will perform a range of tests and screeners to assess cognitive functioning and information processing. Reading assessments and other evaluative tools will be used to examine learning styles, language abilities, and problem-solving skills.

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and autism spectrum disorder (ASD) diagnoses

ADHD and ASD are clinical diagnoses best understood through assessment of symptoms and behaviours. The DSM-5 (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) provides criteria for diagnosis of ADHD and ASD.

ASD assessment for adults

A doctor, pediatrician, or registered psychiatric nurse can complete an assessment; however, for adults, an assessment is usually done by a psychologist or psychiatrist. An ASD assessment may involve a structured observation, discussion of symptoms, review of developmental/medical history, and input from individuals who know the patient.

⁷ The Adult ADHD Centre is an advocate for workplace inclusivity and providing ADHD assessments across Canada.



There is currently no uniform assessment for diagnosing autism in adults. Instead, professionals may adapt assessment tools designed for children or conduct an informal interview.

Before scheduling your assessment, it's important to inquire about the professional's expertise and familiarity with adults on the spectrum.

The assessment process may consist of one or multiple sessions with the professional.

Be ready to discuss your childhood experiences, educational background, and your current mental health and daily functioning.

ADHD assessment for adults

Adult ADHD is diagnosed by a health care provider who conducts a:

- **Psychoeducational Assessment** (by a psychologist); or
- **Medical Assessment** (by a physician, psychiatrist, nurse practitioner, or neurologist)

A psychoeducational assessment, completed by a psychologist, is often sought to determine whether ADHD is impacting learning and performance at school/work. After an extensive number of tests, this assessment provides information on how a person learns best and how a person could be supported academically, socially, and emotionally. Recommendations for non-medication management of ADHD are provided.

A medical assessment, completed by a family physician, pediatrician, nurse practitioner, psychiatrist, or neurologist, often involves a review of medical history, educational history, symptoms, and quality of daily function. Recommendations for non-medication treatments and medication treatments for ADHD are provided.

Each professional brings a different set of expertise to the assessment process. Psychological assessments specialize in understanding behavioral and cognitive aspects, while medical assessments focus more on medical management. While both diagnose ADHD, it is important to understand management goals and decide which of the two assessments is most appropriate.

i For more resources on ADHD, visit www.adultadhdcentre.com.

Key takeaways

- **Diagnosis process:** Begin by consulting a primary care provider to discuss symptoms and needs.
- **Dyslexia and autism diagnosis:** Dyslexia diagnosis involves cognitive and language testing by psychologists, while ASD assessments for adults typically include developmental history, structured observations, and symptom review by psychologists or psychiatrists.
- **ADHD assessment options:** ADHD in adults can be diagnosed via psychoeducational assessments (focus on learning and behavior) or medical evaluations (focus on symptoms and treatment). Choose the approach that aligns with your needs.



2. Disclosing a Neurodivergent Condition

Authored by Matthew M. Létourneau, LLB, and Stéphanie Rochon Perras, LLB, OCT⁸

Benefits and potential consequences of disclosing

You are not required or obliged to disclose information about a medical condition to your employer or colleagues unless you are creating a health and safety risk, are a risk to others, or request an accommodation.

If you need accommodation in the workplace, you must provide your manager with sufficient information about your functional and medical abilities for workplace adaptations. Accommodation of a disability in the workplace is a human right^{xi} that requires a conversation and exchange of information between the employee and employer.

Let's briefly look at the benefits and potential consequences of sharing information about your neurodivergent condition:



Benefits of disclosing

- + Receiving accommodations
- + Greater inclusion in the workplace
- + Health and well-being
- + Bring your whole self to work

Consequences of disclosing

- × Stigma
- × Disability-related discrimination
- × Being or feeling excluded in the workplace
- × Discomfort

Only you can make a well-informed decision about whether requesting accommodations is worth the risk of disclosing information about your neurodivergent condition and needs.

⁸ Matthew Létourneau is a lawyer and former Labour Relations Advisor at ACFO-ACAF. Stéphanie Rochon Perras (elle/she) is a lawyer and certified teacher in Ontario with a specialization in job content and human rights. As the Director of Job Evaluation and Equity at ACFO-ACAF, she champions equitable workplace practices.

How to disclose and/or ask for accommodation from your Employer

When disclosing to your manager, keep the following in mind:

- **Emphasize what you need, not your diagnosis** – Focus on your functional abilities rather than your diagnosis. Keep in mind that you are the primary source of information regarding your needs. You only need to share what you're comfortable with, but clearly communicate your abilities and support or adjustments you need to perform your job effectively.

Example: Disability (ADHD)

Hi [Manager's name],

I wanted to take a moment to share that I have a neurological condition that sometimes affects my concentration, ability to sit still, and impulsiveness. Despite these challenges, I have several strengths that I believe contribute positively to my work, such as quick thinking, high energy, creativity, and strong communication skills.

While I excel in certain areas, I believe that supports and adaptations would help me perform even better in others. I would like to discuss potential accommodations that might work for me, such as having a closed-door office or working from home when possible. The noise cancelling earphones I currently use aren't helping. Additional adjustments would allow me to be more efficient and fully engaged in my role.

Could we arrange a time to explore these options further?

Thank you for your understanding and support.

- **Highlight your strengths** – Share examples of how accommodations have helped you succeed in the past and how those experiences have contributed to your growth and strengths.

Example: Disability (ADHD)

Dear [Manager's Name],

In my last position, I received the opportunity to work in a quieter environment, which greatly enhanced my focus and productivity. This adjustment allowed me to manage my concentration challenges effectively and resulted in a notable improvement in my overall performance. The ability to work from home on certain days also provided me with the flexibility to manage my impulses better and foster my creativity, leading to innovative ideas that benefited my team.

Additionally, having regular check-ins with my supervisor helped me articulate my needs and adjust my workload as necessary. This supportive communication enabled me to leverage my strengths, such as quick problem-solving and effective collaboration with my colleagues.

These experiences have taught me the importance of a tailored approach to my work environment, which ultimately nurtured my growth and allowed me to contribute more meaningfully. I believe that implementing similar accommodations in our current setting could further enhance my performance and overall contribution to the team.

I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss this with you and explore how we can create a supportive environment that leverages my strengths while addressing my challenges.

Thank you for your understanding and support.

- **Understand employer requests** – Employers may ask you to demonstrate that you can meet key job requirements or request documentation to support your accommodation request. Note that your diagnosis or unrelated medical information are not legally required to be disclosed. Any information received regarding your medical condition and abilities must be kept confidential by the Employer and not shared with anyone who does not play a role in the process of accommodating you.
- In some cases, the Employer may request information about your functional abilities from your physician with your consent and prior approval. This request may be made through a questionnaire or a Functional Abilities Form (available in Appendix D of this guide). **Your Employer does not have the right to contact your physician without your explicit consent and prior approval.**
- **Seek professional guidance** – Consider consulting your physician or union representative (labourrelations@acfo-acaf.com) for guidance and support in requesting workplace adaptations.
- **Stay open-minded** – Be prepared to explore different accommodation options and collaborate with your manager or HR to find solutions that work for everyone.

Overall, by initiating open discussions about individual needs and limitations, both employees and employers can work collaboratively to identify barriers and establish effective accommodations. Early disclosure can pave the way for a supportive environment that recognizes and addresses the unique challenges faced by neurodivergent individuals.

How to disclose to a colleague

You are not legally required to disclose information about your medical condition to colleagues but may wish to do so for greater inclusion in the workplace. If you chose to share information, here's a few things to consider:

- Choose the right time and place.
- Be clear and concise.
- Explain your needs and how you colleague can assist.
- Emphasize your strengths.
- Encourage questions and invite your colleague to ask them if they need clarification.
- Set boundaries: let your colleague know what information you're comfortable sharing and what you prefer to keep private.
- Be prepared for different reactions.
- Maintain professionalism: keep the conversation focused on work-related matters and how your colleague can help create a supportive environment.

These points can help create a positive and constructive dialogue about your needs and foster a supportive workplace culture.

Key takeaways

- **Disclosing to employers:** Focus on your functional abilities and needs rather than your diagnosis. Emphasize your strengths and past successes with accommodation and be prepared to collaborate on effective solutions. Employers may request medical documentation about functional abilities but must maintain confidentiality.
- **Seeking support:** Consult with professionals such as physicians or ACFO-ACAF Labour Relations for guidance on accommodations. Maintain an open-minded approach to exploring options that benefit both you and the workplace.
- **Disclosing to colleagues:** Disclosure to colleagues is optional but can foster inclusion. Share information clearly, emphasize strengths, and explain how they can assist while setting boundaries and maintaining professionalism.

Navigating Workplace Accommodations

1. Understanding the Duty to Accommodate

Authored by Stéphanie Rochon Perras, LLB, OCT⁹

Neurodivergent employees may seek workplace-related accommodations. Here are six key points about your rights and obligations to accommodation at work:

1. **Legal obligation:** The duty to accommodate is a legal obligation^{xii} on your employer to provide reasonable accommodations in the workplace for employees who require it due to their disabilities (or other prohibited ground of discrimination), including neurodivergent conditions like autism spectrum disorder (ASD), Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), dyslexia and other neurological differences.
2. **Broad definition of disability:** Disability is broadly defined^{xiii} by human rights legislation to include a wide range of conditions, both visible and invisible, whether past, present, or perceived, and is broad and inclusive, recognizing that it is a complex and multifaceted experience that varies greatly from person to person.
3. **Legislative scope:** Under the current legislative regime, the duty to accommodate applies only to needs based on prohibited grounds of discrimination^{xiv} protected under the human rights legislation. That's because accommodations aim to eliminate disadvantages from systemic discrimination rooted in practices, rules, or procedures, ensuring that everyone can perform their job to the best of their ability.
4. **Intersecting grounds:** The duty to accommodate extends to intersecting human rights grounds^{xv}. For instance, a parent of a neurodivergent dependant may require accommodations based on family status to meet caregiving responsibilities.
5. **Practical and informal adjustments:** Whether the duty to accommodate applies to your situation or not, you can always request the necessary tools, equipment, and workplace adaptations to perform your job effectively. Managers and supervisors are often willing to explore and implement reasonable adjustments, especially if it helps improve a neurodivergent employee's productivity, well-being, and overall job satisfaction.

9 Stéphanie Rochon Perras (elle/she) is a lawyer and certified teacher in Ontario with a specialization in job content and human rights. As the Director of Job Evaluation and Equity at ACFO-ACAF, she champions equitable workplace practices.

6. **Limits to accommodation:** The duty to accommodate has limits. The concept of “undue hardship” sets the legal boundary, meaning your employer is not obligated to provide accommodations that would cause significant difficulty, such as substantial financial costs or safety issues. Minor inconveniences or costs do not constitute undue hardship; the interference must be significant.

Understanding your right to accommodation as a neurodivergent employee is essential for ensuring equitable treatment, productivity, and health and wellness in the workplace. Employers have a legal obligation to provide reasonable accommodations, recognizing a broad and inclusive definition of disability. A collaborative approach between employers and employees is key to creating a more inclusive and supportive work environment.

Key takeaways

- **Legal framework and rights:** Employers are legally obligated to provide reasonable accommodations under the duty to accommodate, which covers neurodivergent medical conditions. Disability is broadly defined to include visible, invisible, and perceived conditions. The duty to accommodate extends to intersecting grounds, such as family status for caregivers, and aims to eliminate systemic discrimination.
- **Limits of accommodation:** Accept and try reasonable accommodations in the workplace (you are not entitled to preferred solutions). Sometimes accommodation is not possible because it would change the fundamental requirements of the job or create significant difficulty on the employer and workplace (i.e.. financial, health or safety risks).



2. Requesting Accommodation: Roles and Responsibilities

Authored by Stéphanie Rochon Perras, LLB, OCT

The duty to accommodate is a legal obligation shared among three key parties: the employee, the employer, and ACFO-ACAF (union). While all parties play crucial roles in the accommodation process, the primary responsibility rests with your employer, who is accountable for managing the workplace and ensuring compliance with accommodation requirements.

Outlined below are the specific responsibilities and roles of each party involved in the accommodation:



The role of the employee

- Inform your employer (preferably in writing) of your differences and needs resulting from a disability requiring workplace accommodation.
- Provide sufficient information on your medical differences and needs. In doing so, you may need to engage your doctor in identifying the needs stemming from the disability. You are not required to disclose your diagnosis, only your medical abilities and how they impact your ability to do your job. In some cases, the need for accommodation is obvious and there is no need for additional documentation.
- Accept and try reasonable accommodations in the workplace (you are not entitled to preferred solutions).
- Participate and cooperate in the accommodation process by providing ongoing feedback and proposals on what works and what doesn't.
- Meet agreed-upon performance and job standards once accommodation is provided.

The role of the employer

- Inquire if an employee is displaying behaviour that may necessitate accommodation.
- Provide respect, dignity, privacy, confidentiality, and autonomy.
- Provide an inclusive and barrier-free workplace based on equity, dignity, and respect that is free from bias, harassment, and discrimination.

- Accept accommodation requests in a timely way and in good faith. This may include creating a temporary solution until a permanent or long-term one is available.
- Request only information that is required to identify and implement the accommodation, including medical restrictions and length of time the accommodation may be required.
- Take reasonable measures – short of undue hardship – to accommodate the employee's disability.
- Where accommodation would cause undue hardship, the employer must explain this clearly to the employee and be prepared to show why this is the case.
- Develop and implement an accommodation plan with the involvement and collaboration of the employee.
- Take an active role in making sure that alternative approaches and possible accommodation solutions are investigated, and research various forms of possible accommodation and alternative solutions.
- Pay the cost of any required medical information or documentation resulting from a request for accommodation in the workplace.
- Your Employer is not required to change the fundamental requirements of the job (bona fide occupational requirements) but rather how the job is performed so long as it allows you to perform the fundamental requirements.
- The Employer should not substitute their own personal views for those of the employee's treating physician.

The role of the union (ACFO-ACAF)

- Ensure that the employer is meeting its duty to accommodate to the point of undue hardship.
- Support the accommodation process, including taking an active role in suggesting alternative approaches, and cooperating fully when solutions are proposed.
- Ensure that the Employer is actively involving the employee and the union in its efforts to accommodate and assess the needs of employees on an individual case-by-case basis.
- Advocate for and support the employee in all aspects of the accommodation process.
- Ensure the Employer agrees to and implements a reasonable accommodation in a timely way.
- Ensure personal health information related to the accommodation remains confidential.
- Ensure requests for accommodation are properly made by the employee and file grievances where the employer has failed to accommodate.

3. ADHD Accommodations and Adaptations

Authored by the Adult ADHD Centre

When considering accommodations and adjustments, understand the different types of adjustments:

1. **Self-adjustments:** Employees might make these changes either consciously or unconsciously, often without anyone noticing.
2. **Informal adjustments:** These are adjustments or accommodations that are within the power of the manager to make. For example, desk location, lighting, and breaks.
3. **Accommodations (formal):** Process through the employer HR/ Accessibility Team that follows company policies and processes.



Here are some common workplace challenges faced by individuals with ADHD, along with tools or adjustments that can provide support. Be sure to review your organization's policies and guidelines before applying these strategies.

Time Management

- Time blocking (set do-not disturb times)
- Visual reminders with colour coding or visual clocks
- Supportive technology such as reminder apps, time management apps
- External (manager) supportive goal setting (not micromanaging)
- Use peer mentor or executive coach
- Body doubling or "work buddy"

Organization & Planning

- Organizational tools like planners/digital calendars to visualize workflow
- Time anchoring with calendar blocking. Use specific time slots assigned to your tasks, creating a structured timeline today.
- 10-minute reset. Reset workspace/task list at the beginning and end of day

Distractibility

- Noise-cancelling headphones, white noise, adjust lighting
- Access quiet zones for concentration
- When possible; closed-door offices; desks facing away from busy areas
- Flexible work arrangements (depends on job function and structure)
- Body doubling or “Focus Buddy”

Meetings

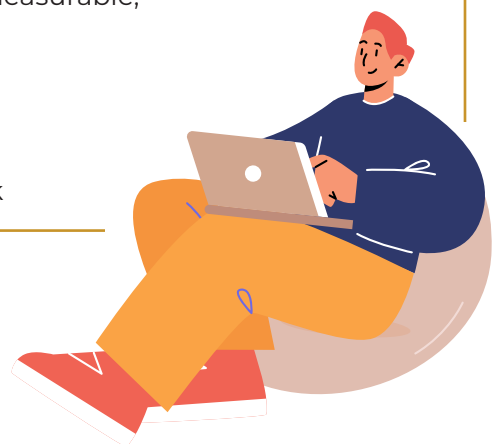
- Shorter meetings with clear objectives
- Request meeting agendas in advance
- Access movement breaks or sit/stand during meetings
- Active note-taking tools to keep engaged
- Utilize fidget tools
- Brainstorm before the meeting
- Request shorter more frequent meetings

Impulsivity

- Incorporating pausing and thinking strategies
- Value taking time to consider decisions
- Utilize mindfulness techniques or meditation techniques
- Frequent breaks
- Use the delay response feature in emails
- Control task switching with apps or time blocking techniques

Task completion

- Set realistic and achievable SMART goals. Specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time bound.
- Recognize and reward progress (gamify)
- Chunk tasks to smaller manageable tasks
- Visual task boards with immediate feedback
- Stack the least favourable task with a rewarding task





Implementing adjustments and accommodations

1. **Identify areas for support:** Consider where you might need help in your work or daily routines and ask yourself what kind of support would help you succeed.
2. **Explore support options:** Research different tools, strategies, and accommodations that may assist you. Try to identify a few that might work well for you and consider testing them out to see how they fit your needs.
3. **Decide on independent or collaborative support:** Reflect on whether you can implement these changes on your own or if you might need help. Support could come from your employer, manager, family, or friends. Also consider whether you need informal adjustments or more formal accommodations at work.
4. **Implement and evaluate:** Put the chosen accommodation or tool into practice. Pay attention to how well it works for you and be open to adjusting if required.
5. **Review regularly:** Periodically check in on how well your accommodations are working. If things change, you may need to tweak or update your approach to ensure continued effectiveness.
6. **Apply your strengths:** Find ways to make the most of your strengths at work, such as your creativity, curiosity, and problem-solving skills.

i For more resources on ADHD, visit the [Adult ADHD Centre website](#).

Key takeaways

- **ADHD overview:** ADHD is a common neurodevelopmental condition that affects attention, self-regulation, and executive function, not a result of laziness or character flaws.
- **Types of adjustments:** Accommodations range from self-adjustments and informal changes (like desk placement) to formal accommodation processed through HR or Accessibility teams.
- **Implementation and evaluation:** Identify areas needing support, explore accommodation options, implement changes, and regularly review their effectiveness to ensure success.



4. Dyslexia Accommodations and Adaptations

Authored by Dyslexia Canada¹⁰

Dyslexia affects everyone differently, so accommodations vary. Some may need minimal support, while others require more, often influenced by the level of help received growing up. If undetected, dyslexia during formative years may require more adjustments depending on its complexity and specific challenges. Common accommodations exist, but it's important to tailor them to everyone's specific needs.

There are many accommodations to help someone with dyslexia. Here are some ideas to get started:

Extra time/ flexible deadlines:

Allow extra time for reading, writing, or processing tasks, especially for more complex or technical work.

Assistive technology:

Provide access to text-to-speech or speech-to-text software, which can help with reading and writing tasks. Reading Pens can transcribe handwritten notes into a Word document, making it easier to turn notes into typed text, and read printed text aloud.

¹⁰ By Tianna Voort, Community Outreach Coordinator and Philip Hicks, a Person with dyslexia and Outreach Volunteer at Dyslexia Canada.

Alternative formats:

Offer documents in different formats, like audio or digital, to suit the individual's needs.

Clear instructions:

Break down tasks into smaller, manageable steps with clear, direct instructions.

Quiet workspaces:

Offer a quiet area or noise-canceling headphones to help minimize distractions and improve focus.

Mentorship or coaching:

Pair the employee with a mentor or coach who can guide them through tasks and offer feedback.

Frequent check-ins:

Schedule regular check-ins to ensure the employee feels supported and has the resources they need to succeed. These check-ins should be structured to include what is going well, as well as any areas or projects that the individual is working on that they may need assistance with.

Visual aids:

Use diagrams, charts, and visuals to help explain concepts and information more clearly.

Spell check:

Install a program like Grammarly on all electronic devices.

Meeting recordings or notes:

Record meetings so they can listen back later. Many people with dyslexia find it hard to record notes quickly, so being able to review meetings can be really helpful. If recording isn't possible due to privacy, assigning someone to take detailed notes could be a good alternative. Offering pre-prepared slides or notes can be very helpful too.

These accommodations are simple to implement but can make a significant difference in helping someone with dyslexia thrive in the workplace.

i For more resources for adults with dyslexia, visit [Dyslexia Canada](#).

Key takeaways

- **Dyslexia overview:** Dyslexia is a neurobiological learning disability that affects reading, writing, and processing information. It is often misunderstood and can lead to stigmatization despite individuals being highly intelligent.
- **Challenges at work:** Dyslexia may cause difficulties in reading complex texts, writing, taking notes, and expressing ideas. Individuals may also struggle with self-esteem and avoid team participation due to their challenges.
- **Workplace accommodations:** Common accommodations include extra time, assistive technology (e.g., text-to-speech software), alternative document formats, clear instructions, quiet workspaces, mentorship, and regular check-ins to ensure support.





5. Autism Accommodations and Adaptations

By Autism Canada

As workplaces evolve to become more inclusive and accessible, it is essential to implement accommodations tailored to the unique needs of neurodivergent employees, including those on the Autism Spectrum. These adaptations empower employees to succeed, contribute their strengths, and thrive in their professional roles. This summary highlights strategies and accommodations to support Autistic employees, while adhering to the principles of the Barrier-Free Canada Accessibility Act.

Flexible work arrangements

- **Flexible work arrangements:** Offering the option to adjust work hours to accommodate individual energy levels or sensory needs. Some employees may prefer working outside traditional office hours to avoid sensory overload.
- **Remote work:** Providing the choice to work from home or in a quieter space can help minimize distractions and reduce sensory overload.
- **Task-oriented workflows:** Allowing employees to work on tasks in a sequence that suits their individual workflow, accommodating periods of hyperfocus or alternating between tasks for variety.

Sensory-friendly workspaces

- **Quiet areas:** Designating noise-reduced or quiet spaces where employees can work without distractions.
- **Lighting adjustments:** Offering adjustable lighting or access to natural light to accommodate light sensitivity. Using softer, non-fluorescent lighting can reduce sensory stress.
- **Personalized workstations:** Allowing employees to personalize their work environment with tools such as noise-cancelling headphones, standing desks, or alternative seating options.

Clear and consistent communication

- **Structured communication channels:** Providing clear, consistent written instructions to complement verbal communication. Offering advance notice for meetings and changes to work routines helps Autistic employees plan and reduce anxiety.
- **Inclusive meetings and one-on-one Interactions:** In meetings or one-on-one interactions with HR, managers, or during high-level communication, it's important to have someone present to help advocate for the neurodivergent individual. The advocate, equipped with specialized training and knowledge in supporting neurodivergent individuals, can facilitate effective communication between the individual and the employer. They ensure that both parties have a shared understanding of each other's needs and expectations, with a particular focus on the unique strengths and challenges of the neurodivergent employee. This expertise helps create a cohesive and inclusive environment, where necessary accommodations are clearly communicated, fostering mutual respect and understanding in the workplace.
- **Feedback Mechanisms:** Offering direct, constructive feedback through predictable formats. Regular feedback sessions allow employees to adjust their work effectively.

Workplace adjustments for sensory processing needs

- **Minimizing distractions:** Offering tools like noise-cancelling devices, screen dividers, or apps that block digital distractions can help maintain focus in open-plan offices.
- **Alternative communication methods:** Utilizing visual supports (charts, diagrams, or task lists) and written communication for employees who may prefer less direct social interaction.
- **Frequent breaks:** Allowing for regular short breaks to manage sensory overload, balancing a sustainable and productive workday.

Professional development and support

- **Mentorship programs:** Connecting autistic employees with mentors who can provide guidance, advocacy, and support for career development.
- **Ongoing training for all staff:** Conducting neurodiversity awareness training to create a supportive and understanding workplace. This promotes a culture where all employees, including those on the Autism Spectrum, feel valued.
- **Access to mental health resources:** Providing access to counselling services or Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) to help manage the mental health challenges associated with neurodivergence.

Inclusive and accessible conversations

- **Ask, don't assume:** Creating a fully inclusive workplace starts with asking individuals directly how they can feel included, safe, and valued as part of the team. By understanding their unique needs, employers can provide accommodations that genuinely support their professional success. Asking questions, rather than making assumptions, fosters inclusion and respect.
- **Language matters:** Using respectful, inclusive language is key to ensuring employees feel seen and valued. Our Words Matter Guide offers helpful guidelines for fostering an inclusive workplace dialogue.

Reasonable accommodations under the Accessible Canada Act

Employers are legally obligated to provide reasonable accommodations for neurodivergent employees under the Accessible Canada Act.

This includes:

- **Adaptive Technology:** Access to tools that assist with communication, planning, and time management (e.g., screen readers, task management software).
- **Inclusive Policies:** Ensuring that workplace policies promote accessibility and inclusion for neurodivergent employees.
- **Collaborative Adaptation Planning:** Engaging directly with the employee to create a personalized plan for accommodations that meet their individual needs.

Conclusion

By implementing these accommodations, neurodivergent employees can be empowered, particularly those on the Autism Spectrum, to succeed in the federal public service. Ensuring that all employees have access to the tools, support, and flexibility they need aligns with the Barrier-Free Canada Accessibility Act, fostering a more inclusive and productive workplace for all.

i For more resources, consult Autism Junction: www.autismcanada.org/resources/autism-junction

Key takeaways

- **Workplace flexibility and sensory support:** Accommodations like flexible work hours, remote work options, quiet areas, adjustable lighting, and personalized workstations help minimize distractions and sensory overload for employees with autism.
- **Clear communication and feedback:** Structured communication channels, consistent feedback, and advocacy during meetings promote understanding and reduce anxiety for individuals with autism.
- **Professional development and inclusive culture:** Mentorship, ongoing neurodiversity training, and mental health support, along with asking employees about their specific needs, ensure a supportive, inclusive workplace for all.



Leveraging Professional Development for Neurodivergent Career Growth^{xvi}

Authored by Megan Walter,
Learning & Development Specialist, ACFO-ACAF¹¹

How to maximize success and satisfaction as a neurodivergent employee

To succeed as a neurodivergent employee, embrace your strengths – like hyperfocus, creativity, or problem-solving – and seek roles that match them. Focus on professional development that aligns with your learning style to enhance your skills and career growth.

Understanding your unique strengths & opportunities for growth

Conducting a personal SWOT analysis clarifies your strengths, weaknesses, values, and threats, guiding your career goals. Here's a table to help you identify opportunities for improvement and decide where to focus your training efforts.

¹¹ Megan Walter is a Learning and Development Specialist at ACFO-ACAF. She is committed to creating accessible and inclusive professional development experiences that support all members. Megan is a certified teacher with the Ontario College of Teachers and holds a Bachelor of Education from Wilfrid Laurier University and a Bachelor of Social Sciences from the University of Ottawa. Megan is also a certified emotional intelligence facilitator for the EQ-i 2.0 and EQ 360 models.



Strengths/Values

- What are my unique strengths in my career? What am I really good at?
- What am I really interested in?
- What do I value at work?
- What is really important to me about my career and workplace?
- What positive feedback have I received?



Weaknesses/Areas of Improvement

- What are my challenges in my career?
- What skill areas do I need improvement in?
- What tasks do I usually avoid?
- What constructive feedback have I received?



Opportunities

- What professional development opportunities might I have to improve?
- How can I leverage my strengths to have a successful career?
- What accommodations might help me to be successful?
- Is there a need in my department that no one is filling?



Threats

- What aspects of my professional environment might prevent me from being successful?
- What concerns do I have regarding progression in my career?



Identifying areas for learning: Setting SMART Goals

After identifying areas for improvement, set meaningful SMART goals – specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound. This ensures your training aligns with your career aspirations. Use the example and template below to create SMART goals based on your SWOT analysis.

Example: SMART goal – Improve Public Speaking

SMART GOALS

Example: Improve Public Speaking



S **SPECIFIC:** What is your specific goal?
Example: Attend communications courses through the ACFO-ACAF Joint Career Development Program (JCDP).

M **MEASURABLE:** How will you measure whether you have accomplished your goal?
Example: Attend one JCDP Communications Essentials course and present on the CT Community Stage at the Spring Tune Up.

A **ACHIEVABLE:** How will you accomplish this?
Example: Apply to the JCDP lottery and list the communications course as my first choice. Respond to JCDP emails if I am selected, attend the required courses, and complete related asynchronous work.

R **REALISTIC:** Is accomplishing this goal possible? Explain why. If not, explain alternatives.
Example: Since I have not taken a JCDP course in three years, I have a higher chance of being selected for the lottery. However, if I am not selected, I can talk to my manager about other public speaking courses available to me.

T **TIMED:** How long will it take to accomplish this goal?
Example: If I get through the JCDP lottery, it will take me until December to complete this goal. If not, I will have to revisit this timing.

How to leverage your learning and development plan

As an employee of the Government of Canada, as part of the [performance management program](#), you have a Public Service Performance Agreement as set out by the [Directive on Performance Management](#). In the Performance Agreement, there is a learning and development plan through which employers and employees collaborate to determine what training the employee will participate in to fulfill their job-specific functions and for career development.

The learning and development plan serves as a valuable tool to proactively shape your career path. When it comes time to review and make changes to your Performance Agreement, discuss the learning and development plan with your supervisor and ensure that you have at least one learning activity that aligns with the SMART goal(s) you set for yourself.

In some cases, you may also receive a Talent Management Plan. This plan is designed to support leadership development and career progression. If you have a Talent Management Plan, work closely with your supervisor to ensure it complements your career goals and provides the resources and opportunities needed to advance.

Building your case for professional development: Employees

When you are seeking training as employees, it can sometimes be difficult to get approval from your managers due to budget or time constraints. To gain approval for professional development, focus on showing your leaders the value of the training, rather than its cost, and how it benefits both you and your team.

For neurodivergent employees, professional development:

- **Creates agility & adaptability:** Training and professional development encourage a growth mindset, which psychologist Carol Dweck defines as the belief that success is based on hard work, learning, and training. Adopting this mindset is crucial for career growth, offering a unique opportunity to leverage diverse strengths, embrace curiosity, and enhance skills^{xvii}
- **Builds your network:** Having a strong professional network ensures you have support and mentorship throughout your career. Building relationships across departments increases your visibility and access to opportunities. Additionally, people in your network can offer valuable assistance and advice during the hiring process.
- **Boosts confidence & credibility:** Engaging in professional development enhances our confidence and credibility, as it allows us to continuously improve our skills, practice communicating for impact, and approach challenges positively.

Growth Mindset

- Mistakes help me learn
- I improve with practice
- Feedback is valuable
- Is this my best work?
- I won't give up



Fixed Mindset

- I know best
- This is good enough
- I give up
- I'll never be that smart
- I want to avoid making mistakes



Building your case for professional development: Leaders

As neurodivergent leaders or leaders of neurodivergent employees, the value of training and professional development lies in your ability to foster belonging and ensure employee satisfaction and retention.

For neurodivergent leaders, professional development:

- **Fosters belonging:** For neurodivergent leaders, professional development (PD) can provide tools and frameworks to navigate and articulate your own experiences, enabling you to lead with authenticity and confidence. When you are leading neurodivergent individuals, it is essential to create inclusive environments where everyone feels valued and heard. When leaders – whether neurodivergent or neurotypical – show empathy and use inclusive language, they foster belonging and create a psychologically safe environment for all employees.
- **Increases employee retention and satisfaction:** Training allows employees to grow both personally and professionally, which increases meaningful connection to their work. PD also builds trust as employees are empowered to explore their interests and apply the knowledge and skills that they learn.

Connecting with mentors

Having a career mentor as a neurodivergent individual can be incredibly valuable for your professional growth. A neurodiversity-aware mentor can be invaluable for your career, helping you navigate challenges, leverage strengths, complete a personal SWOT analysis, set realistic goals, advocate for accommodations, and grow your professional network.

Getting the most out of professional development

When creating your learning plan and selecting your professional development for the year, remember your personal SWOT analysis and your SMART goals. These goals will ensure your training is relevant and contributes to your current role or future career plans. Setting a time-bound deadline creates urgency and accountability, helping you stay focused and motivated throughout the development process. By following the SMART framework, you can turn your training efforts into tangible, career-enhancing outcomes.

Accommodations for learning

Learning accommodations are important because they allow neurodivergent individuals equal access to professional development opportunities.

Examples of Accommodations:

Instructional Accommodations

- Pace and/or volume of instruction
- Written instructions for tasks
- Breaks or chunking of information
- Captions and/or transcripts
- Preferences for group work

Environmental Accommodations

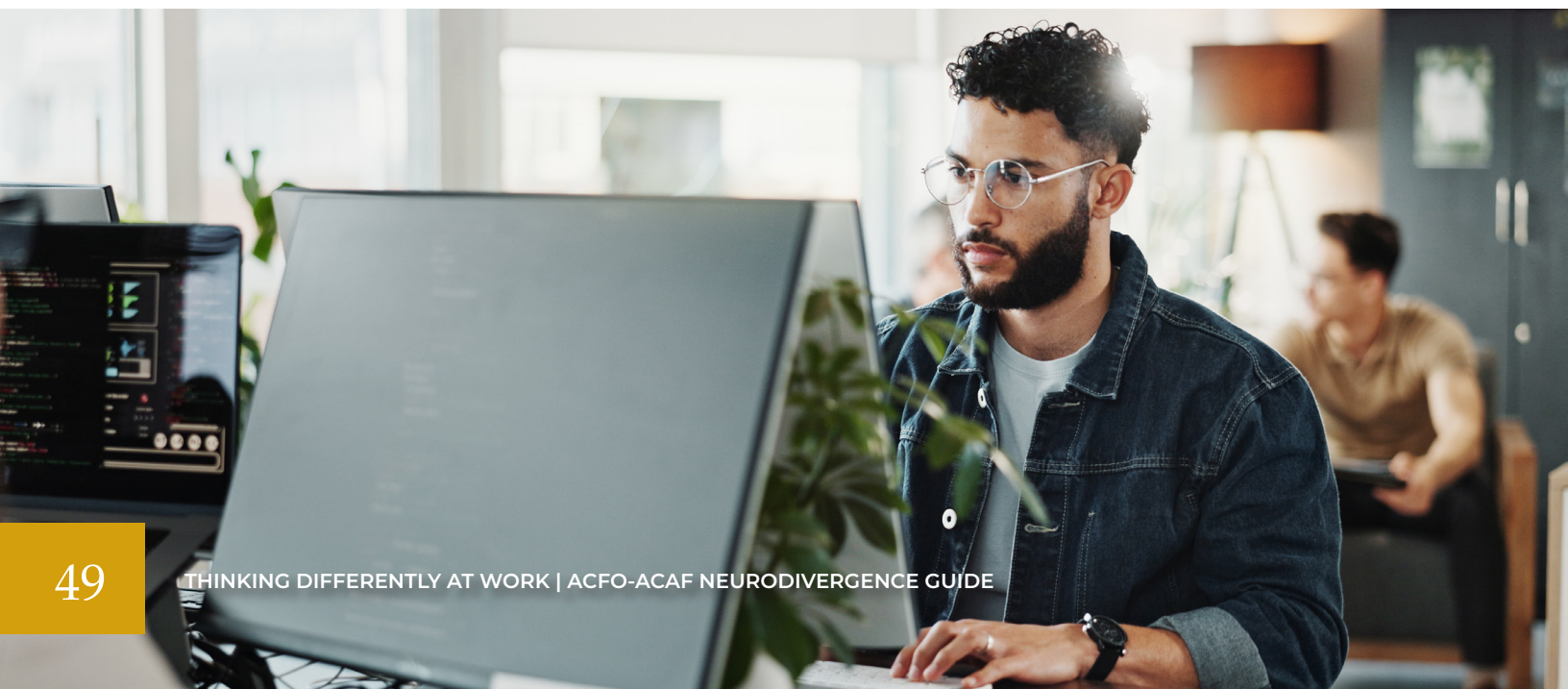
- Lighting adjustments
- Preferential seating
- Ergonomic seating
- Earplugs or headphones

Resource Accommodations

- Adjustments of font size and/or colour
- Accessible PDFs and screen-reader-friendly documents
- Printed documents

Technological Accommodations

- Assistive technology





Key takeaways^{xviii}

- **Maximizing strengths and professional development:** Neurodivergent employees should leverage their unique strengths (e.g., hyperfocus, creativity) and align professional development with their learning style to foster career growth, using tools like a SWOT analysis and SMART goals to guide their development.
- **Building a case for development:** Neurodivergent employees and leaders should emphasize the value of professional development, focusing on how it enhances agility, builds networks, boosts confidence, and fosters belonging, ultimately benefiting both the individual and the organization.
- **Accommodations for learning and growth:** Neurodivergent employees can benefit from tailored accommodations (e.g., flexible pace, ergonomic seating, assistive technology) to ensure equal access to professional development opportunities, enabling them to achieve their goals effectively.

Appendix A

Summary of strategies for supporting neurodivergent employees

These strategies aim to empower neurodivergent employees and foster a more inclusive, supportive work environment.

EDUCATE AND ADVOCATE

Continuously learn about neurodiversity and its intersections with gender, race, and mental health. Engage in workplace advocacy groups and supports to represent neurodivergent perspectives.

REQUEST ACCOMMODATIONS

Understand your legal rights regarding workplace accommodations, provide sufficient information on your medical differences and needs, and accept and try reasonable accommodations in the workplace.

PROMOTE INCLUSION

Challenge stereotypes about neurodivergence and actively support diverse representation within teams, fostering an inclusive work culture.

UTILIZE SELF-CARE

Prioritize your well-being through self-care practices, which will help you manage the challenges of navigating the workplace and support advocacy efforts.

LEVERAGE STRENGTHS

Recognize and utilize your unique strengths related to neurodivergence to contribute positively to your team and work environment.

CREATE SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS

Encourage modifications in the workplace, such as noise reduction, flexible hours, and tailored communication methods to better support neurodivergent colleagues.

ENGAGE IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Set SMART goals related to your career and engage in professional development activities that align with your strengths and interests to advance your skill set.

FOSTER COMMUNITY AND BELONGING

Connect with supportive communities within the workplace that acknowledge and celebrate neurodiversity, enhancing feelings of belonging and acceptance.

IMPLEMENT FEEDBACK MECHANISMS

Utilize regular feedback loops with your manager to ensure that accommodations are working and discuss additional support needs if necessary.

FOCUS ON MENTAL HEALTH

Address mental health risks by promoting open discussions about mental wellness and ensuring access to mental health resources and support networks.

Appendix B:

Glossary of terms

Accessible Canada Act (ACA): A federal law that aims to make Canada barrier-free to people with disabilities by 2040.

Accessibility: The design of products, devices, services, information, and environments to make them sensible, meaningful, and usable for as many people as possible, especially for people with disabilities.

Acquired brain injury (ABI): Brain damage that occurs after birth caused by events such as a motor vehicle accident, disease, or head injury, and is not caused by a genetic or development disorder.

Anxiety disorders: A group of mental health disorders characterized by significant or uncontrollable feelings of fear and dread that interferes with daily life.

Attention-Deficit/ Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD): A neurodevelopmental disorder with that can include inattention (inability to focus), hyperactivity (excess movement inappropriate for the setting), and impulsivity. Strengths can include creativity, adaptability, hyperfocus, problem-solving, and enthusiasm.

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD): A neurodevelopmental disorder that affects communication, learning, and behaviour, causing challenges with social interaction and self-regulation. Symptoms can include repetitive behaviours, restricted ranges of interests, and difficulty interpreting emotions. Strengths can include being highly methodical, integrity, innovative thinking, and a strong attention to detail.

Depression: A mental health condition that causes a persistent feeling of sadness and loss of interest/pleasure that can interfere with daily life.

Developmental coordination disorder (DCD): A condition that impacts motor skill development, affecting the ability to learn and perform everyday tasks.

DSM-5 (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders): The standard classification of mental disorders used by mental health professionals published by the American Psychiatric Association (APA).

Duty to accommodate: A legal obligation on the employer to provide reasonable accommodations in the workplace for employees who require it due to their disabilities (or other prohibited ground of discrimination).

Dyscalculia: A learning disability that makes it difficult to understand numbers and math concepts.

Dysgraphia: A learning disability that makes it difficult to write and translate thoughts into written words.

Dyslexia: A specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.

Intersectionality: Overlapping or ‘intersecting’ social identities result in unique combinations of discrimination and privilege, including gender, caste, sex, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, religion, disability, height, age, and weight.

Joint Career Development Program (JCDDP): Allocates nearly \$1.5 million worth of training every year to ACFO-ACAF members covered by the CT Collective Agreement. This funding was secured by ACFO-ACAF in 2016, and the program is co-managed by ACFO-ACAF and the Office of the Comptroller General (OCG).

Neurodivergence: Having a brain that forms or works differently than what is considered typical (“neurotypical”). Neurodivergent individuals have both strengths and challenges as a result, with differences including neurological disorders like Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or autism spectrum disorder (ASD), learning disabilities like dyslexia, and/or mental health conditions like anxiety and depression.

Neurodiversity: A group of individuals that includes more than one neurotype. Neurodiversity in the workplace is crucial for reducing stigma, creating a safe environment, enhancing team creativity, and much more.

Neurotype: A type of brain in terms of whether it functions typically (neurotypical) or differently (neurodivergent).

Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD): A mental and behavioural disorder where a person experiences uncontrollable and recurring thoughts (obsessions), engages in repetitive behaviours (compulsions), or both that interfere with daily life.

Sensory processing differences (SPDs): The interpretation of sensory information that is different than others, causing hypersensitive or hyposensitive reactions to sensory input, distorted perceptions to sensory input, and/or difficulty with filtering out irrelevant sensory information. This is common in neurodivergent individuals.

SMART goals: Individual goals set that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound.

Tourette syndrome: A neurological disorder that involves repetitive and rapid movements or unwanted sounds (tics) that cannot be easily controlled.

Workplace accommodation: Any change in the work environment or the terms and conditions of employment that allows a person with limitations in their abilities or who faces barriers from the standard rules and conditions of work to perform their job.

Appendix C

External Organizations and More Information

Association of Canadian Financial Officers (your union)

- The ACFO Labour Relations team is available to assist CT group and NAV CANADA FI members with workplace issues or questions: labourrelations@acfo-acaf.com

ADHD Adult Centre

- For more resources for adults with ADHD and how to get a diagnosis: www.adultadhdcentre.com/living-with-adhd/about-adhd/

Autism Canada

- Fact sheet and resources for adults with autism: www.autismcanada.org/publications

Canada School of Public Service

- Learning provider for public servants: www.cspc-efpc.gc.ca/catalogue/paths-eng.aspx

Canadian ADHD Resource Alliance

- For more resources for adults with ADHD: www.caddra.ca/monthly-update-newsletter/

Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion

- For more resources, podcast and webinar for neurodivergent individuals: www.ccdi.ca/

Canadian Human Rights Commission

- The CHRC offers resources on the legal rights of neurodivergent individuals in the workplace: www.chrc-ccdp.gc.ca/en

Centre for ADHD Awareness Canada

- For more resources and a practical guide for adults: www.caddac.ca/programs-and-events/#adhd-resource-navigator

Conference Board of Canada

- Breaking Down Barriers: Improving the Workplace Experience for Neurodivergent Canadians:
www.conferenceboard.ca/?s=neurodiversity&sort=desc
- Building Workplaces Where Neurodivergent Workers Thrive:
www.conferenceboard.ca/?s=neurodiversity&sort=desc

Dyslexia Canada

- For more resources for adults with dyslexia:
www.dyslexiacanada.org/en/blog/resources-for-adults-with-dyslexia
- Fact sheet adults with dyslexia:
www.dyslexiaida.org/adolescents-and-adults-with-dyslexia/
- Fact sheet about dyslexia:
www.dyslexiaida.org/dyslexia-basics-2/
- Accommodations:
www.dyslexiaida.org/accommodations-for-students-with-dyslexia/

GMB Union

- Thinking Differently at Work Toolkit:
www.gmb.org.uk/thinking-differently-at-work/neurodiversity-toolkit.pdf

Infinity Network for Neurodivergent Public Servants

- Connect with other neurodivergent public servants:
www.wiki.gccollab.ca/Infinity

The Inclusive Workplace

- A leading resource hub for up to-date resources, education and tools to support employees in their employment journey :
www.theinclusiveworkplace.ca/en/pages/for-jobseekeremployees

Worktopia

- Quick-read resources for neurodiverse employees:
www.worktopia.ca/resource/quick-guides

Appendix D

Functional Abilities Forms

Your employer may request that you physician complete [this form](#) in the context of an accommodation request.

Appendix E

Endnotes

- i Norstedt, M. (2019). Work and invisible disabilities: Practices experiences and understandings of nondisclosure. *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research*, 21(1), 14-24.
- ii Botha, M., Chapman, R., Giwa Onaiwu, M., Kapp, S. K., Stannard Ashley, A., & Walker, N. (2024). The neurodiversity concept was developed collectively: An overdue correction on the origins of neurodiversity theory. *Autism*, 28(6), 1591-1594.
- iii Embracing neurodiversity at work: how Canadians with autism can help employers close the talent gap by Deloitte Canada, see <https://www2.deloitte.com/ca/en/pages/careers/topics/life-at-deloitte/new-report-by-deloitte-canada-and-auticon-canada-finds-employment-barriers-lack-of-workplace-support-for-autistic-community.html>.
- iv Adopted by the International Dyslexia Association Board of Directors, Nov. 12, 2002. This Definition is also used by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.
- v Ossola, A. (2021). Neurodiverse applicants are revolutionizing the hiring process. *Quartz*. <https://qz.com/work/1981466/neurodiverse-applicants-are-revolutionizing-the-hiring-process>
- vi Praslova, L.N. Autism Doesn't Hold People Back at Work. Discrimination Does. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2021/12/autism-doesnt-hold-people-back-at-work-discrimination-does>
- vii How to support the mental health of neurodivergent employees, *Occupational Health & Wellbeing Plus* – from *Personnel Today*, Lou Campbell, February 21, 2024.
- viii How to truly support neurodiversity in the workplace, *Everymind at Work*, Emily Addison, December 2, 2021.
- ix The Connection Between Neurodiversity and Mental Health in the Workplace, *Uptimize*, <https://uptimize.com/mental-health-dei/>
- x How to support the mental health of neurodivergent employees, *Occupational Health & Wellbeing Plus* – from *Personnel Today*, Lou Campbell, February 21, 2024.
- xi The legal obligations relating to disclosure can vary, and may include the Canadian Human Rights Act, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Accessible Canada Act, a Collective Agreement provision or employer policies, guides, procedures or other directives.
- xii The legal and policy framework that relate to accommodation in the workplace for federal government employees, are as follows: Canadian Human Rights Act, Employment Equity Act, Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Accessibility Act, Directive on the Duty to Accommodate, Policy on People Management and the Values and Ethics Code for the Public Sector and the Clerk's Call of Action on Anti-Racism, Equity, and Inclusion in the Federal Public Service.

- xiii The term “disability” is defined in the CHRA as: “...any previous or existing mental or physical disability and includes disfigurement and previous or existing dependence on alcohol or a drug”. While that the term “persons with disabilities” is defined in the Employment Equity Act (EEA) as: “persons who have a long-term or recurring physical, mental, sensory, psychiatric or learning impairment and who consider themselves to be disadvantaged in employment by reason of that impairment, or believe that a employer or potential employer is likely to consider them to be disadvantaged in employment by reason of that impairment, and includes persons whose functional limitations owing to their impairment have been accommodated in their current job or workplace”.
- xiv Under the CHRA, there are 13 prohibited grounds of discrimination: race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital status, family status, disability, genetic characteristics or pardoned conviction (or suspension of record). Additionally, your CT Collective agreement also recognizes membership in, or activity with, the Association (your union, ACFO-ACAF).
- xv See footnote n.3 above.
- xvi References in this section include : <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/swot.asp>, <https://www.neurodiversityhub.org/job-readiness> and <https://www.mindtools.com/aaiakpy/personal-swot-analysis>.
- xvii Fueling the Motivation that Lies Within: Using the Growth Mindset to. ... (2024, January 8). DANSR, Inc. <https://www.dansr.com/resources/fueling-the-motivation-that-lies-within-using-the-growth-mindset-to-empower-and-grow-your-art>
- xviii ChatGPT was used to help in the preparation of the key takeaways listed throughout the document.

