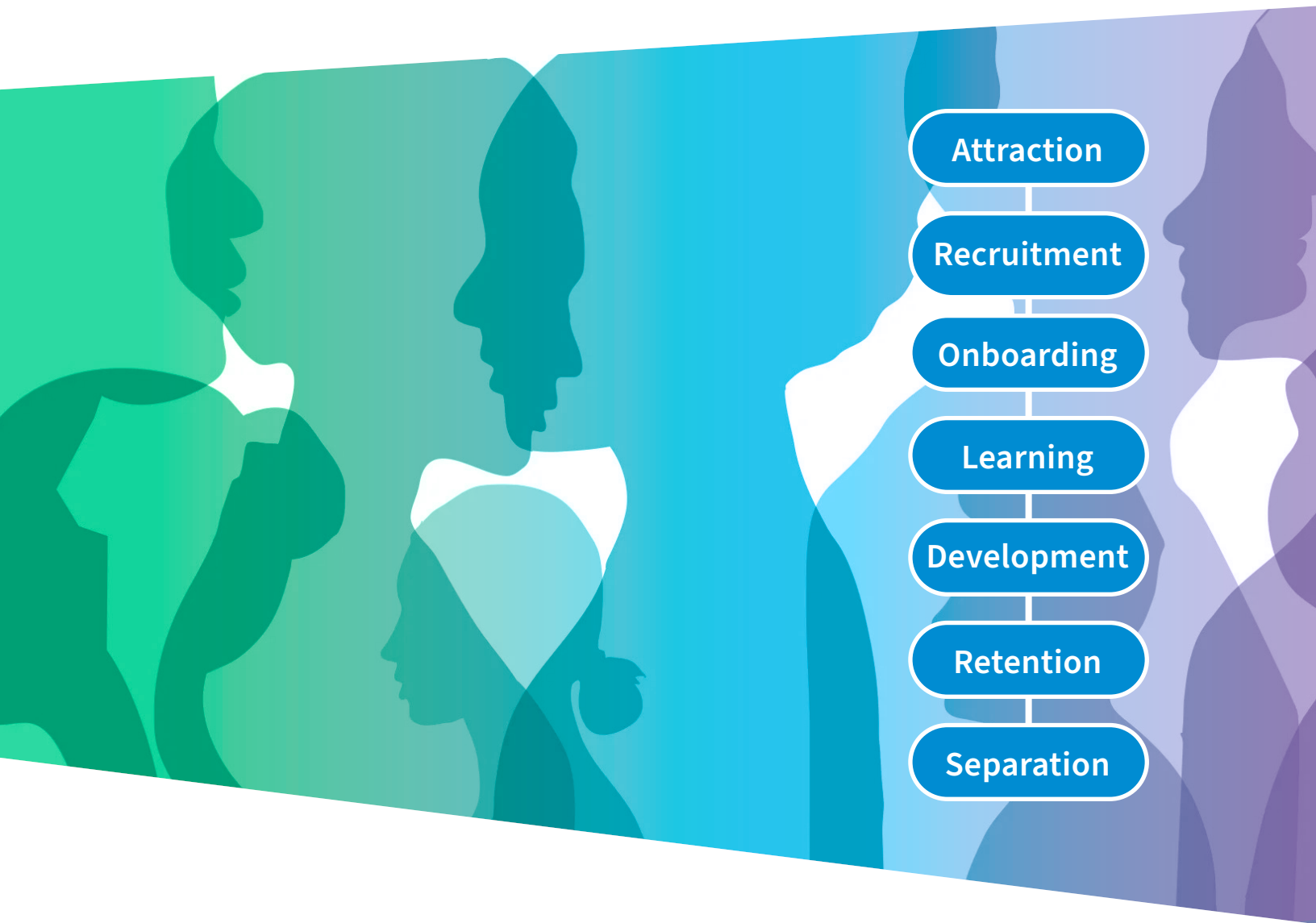


# Quick Guide


## NEUROinclusion and the Employee Lifecycle



## Employer Resource

To Support Inclusion of Neurodivergent Employees





This resource highlights key phases of the employment lifecycle extracted from the **Success in the Workplace: Employer Toolkit**.

It shares strategies and workplace adjustments that support both employee and employer success. The Employer Toolkit was authored by an autistic self-advocate, and development of the full resource involved extensive engagement with autistic employees and a range of employers and human resources professionals across Canada.

**The full version of the Employer Toolkit can be downloaded at [worktopia.ca](https://worktopia.ca).**

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Calgary, Alberta, Canada



# Background



**Neurodiversity** is a difference in how people experience, think about, and act on information.

**Neuroinclusion** in the workforce means creating a culture that fosters inclusion of neurodivergent individuals and setting up the structure needed to promote lasting change.

## Weaving inclusion into the employee lifecycle



This Quick Guide was created to provide practical strategies for employers to advance neuroinclusion in the workplace. It highlights opportunities across the employee life cycle to make impactful changes that benefit everyone.



# ***Attraction***

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Inclusive practices that will attract a more diverse and talented workforce, as well as a broader customer or client base include:

- ▶ Communicating in easily accessible, plain language.
- ▶ Ensuring website and online materials are accessible and demonstrate inclusivity.
- ▶ Using photos and images that reflect the diversity in Canada.
- ▶ Supporting workplace learning about different elements of diversity so that people of different backgrounds, identities, experiences, strengths and abilities are welcomed and valued.
- ▶ Implementing universal design principles when developing policies and processes. Examples of universal design relevant to neurodiversity include clear signage, speech to text, closed captioning, and scent-free policies.



# Recruitment

Several practices can make the recruitment phase more inclusive for all applicants.

## Neuroinclusive position description strategies:

- ▶ Focus only on the essential qualifications, skills and experience that are required for the position.
- ▶ Provide a clear and succinct description of the physical and social environment for this job.
- ▶ Include inclusive hiring statements in position descriptions.
- ▶ Let candidates know that you are ready to help them succeed. Incorporate a statement about the availability of adjustments. Example : “Adjustments are available upon request to all candidates throughout the selection process, as well as on the job.”
- ▶ Use clear, succinct language that can be interpreted literally.

## Neuroinclusive interview strategies:

- ▶ Consider the best way to determine suitability of a candidate. Options include:
  - **Traditional Interview** question and answer
  - **Skills Assessments** leverage standardized tests to evaluate required skills
  - **Skill Demonstrations** where suitable/appropriate
- ▶ Share the following details with all candidates in advance of an interview:
  - **The Who, What, Where, When And How!**

<b>Who</b> will be conducting the interview.	<b>What</b> type of interview and some/all the questions to be asked.	<b>Where</b> the interview will take place (e.g. location and space).	<b>When</b> the interview takes place (i.e. start and end time).	<b>How</b> a candidate should dress.
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- Provide the opportunity to request adjustments for the interview as part of the process.
- ▶ Provide a quiet, distraction-free environment for the interview or host a virtual interview.
- ▶ Limit the number of interviewers.
- ▶ Recognize and accept individual differences in interaction style. For example, limited eye contact, fidgeting.
- ▶ Ask clearly worded questions to get the information you are seeking. For example, try “Tell me one or two things you are good at that will help you in this job” instead of “What are your strengths?”

# Onboarding

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The onboarding stage of the employment life cycle provides an important opportunity to welcome new employees and set them up for long-term success. A great onboarding experience [improves new-hire retention by 82 percent and increases productivity by 70 percent](#).

## Strategies to support successful onboarding :

- ▶ Send an email in advance of their first day with instructions including dates, times, locations and contact information.
- ▶ Assign a 'buddy' for new employees to support orientation to the unwritten 'rules' or norms at your workplace, such as dress code and breaks, and to introduce them to co-workers.
- ▶ Create a workplace glossary of acronyms and commonly used industry terms.
- ▶ Check in regularly with your new employee – ongoing feedback and support in the early days is important.
- ▶ Make workplace adjustment requests a clear part of your onboarding processes for all – not just by exception. Clearly developed and articulated processes to ask for accommodations (i.e. adjustments) help employees to advocate for what they need to be successful on the job.

The term “accommodation” often implies special treatment for people with disabilities. One way to demonstrate inclusion for disabilities is to move away from the language of accommodation. Recognize and communicate that accommodations are simply “adjustments, strategies or supports” that employers make to ensure all employees can perform at their best.



Workplace accommodations are often [easy to implement and cost less than employers think](#). A 2023 study from the Job Accommodation Network (JAN) indicates that 720 employers who reported on accommodations,

**50%** of accommodations cost absolutely nothing and one-time accommodations had an averaged cost of **\$300**

### Commonly requested workplace adjustments for neurodivergent employees:

- ▶ Access to a quiet workspace that's free of visual and auditory distractions.
- ▶ Reasonable adjustments that support/enable management of sensory differences like noise canceling headphones or sunglasses.
- ▶ Ability to control temperature, fans, and ventilation for their immediate workspace.
- ▶ Access to fidget devices.
- ▶ Ability to get up and move when needed.
- ▶ LED lighting or lighting that doesn't hum and flicker.
- ▶ Flexible working hours.
- ▶ Scent-free environment.
- ▶ Access to weighted blankets, vests or lap pads.
- ▶ Access to different chair and seating options.

# Learning & Development

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Organizations receive many benefits when they provide ongoing learning and development opportunities for their employees. These should include regular opportunities to learn about inclusive practices, adjustments, strategies and supports.

**Incorporate inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility (IDEA) awareness and training for all employees.** Neurodiversity awareness can be incorporated into any regular IDEA training and is an important part of developing understanding and appreciation of colleagues.

**Ensure learning opportunities are inclusive.** Equipped with an understanding of what your employees require to succeed on the job, take the same approach when evaluating training methods and ways employees can engage and participate. If employees attend training delivered by a third party, ensure the trainer and training space can support the adjustments an employee may require.

**Empower employees to be open and honest about their learning and development needs, and work with them to determine what will help them maximize their success.** Ask employees what new skills and competencies they need or want to develop.





# Retention

Promote neurodivergent (and all) employee success by embracing strategies that:

- ▶ Respect communication preferences.
- ▶ Create consistent and clear feedback loops.
- ▶ Communicate and manage change.
- ▶ Support access to social situations.



## Respecting communication preferences

- 1 Using multiple sources to communicate (verbal, written, visual supports, social stories).
- 2 Keeping conversations short, specific, and concrete (less is more).
- 3 Communicating complex tasks by breaking them down into smaller tasks.
- 4 Allow adequate time to process and respond to questions.
- 5 Sharing feedback and expectations using clear and concise language.
- 6 Say what you mean to avoid misunderstandings: avoid using sarcasm, figurative language, rhetorical questions, idioms or exaggeration.



## Boost employee confidence

- ▶ Creating regular feedback loops with employees; don't save it for performance reviews.
- ▶ Allowing employees to address concerns as they arise.
- ▶ Providing feedback that is honest, non-judgmental, and clear.
- ▶ Reviewing any supports and adjustments with employees and changing as needed.
- ▶ Being transparent about what's involved in planned performance reviews.
- ▶ Providing employees with a draft of their performance review in advance.



## Communicating and managing change

**Strategies that may help employees adjust to change include:**

- ▶ Providing advanced notice of change.
- ▶ Explaining reasons for changes.
- ▶ Providing timelines for change.
- ▶ Allowing time to process and respond to the change.
- ▶ Creating space to answer employee questions about the change.
- ▶ Involving employees in change management process.
- ▶ Regularly checking in - being patient, understanding, and flexible during any change



## Supportive social situations

Employees may have varying preferences and comfort levels when it comes to socializing in the workplace. Strategies for creating more inclusive social situations include:

- ▶ Providing advanced notice of social events.
- ▶ Empowering and encouraging employees to participate in social committees.
- ▶ Ensuring quiet spaces are available at an event or social gathering.
- ▶ Allowing employees to skip (or attend a portion of) social events without judgement or repercussions.
- ▶ Connecting employees with a 'buddy' to help them navigate social events (if required)



# *Separation*

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Asking an outgoing employee the right questions during an exit interview will help employers learn from their experience, reflect on the feedback and make meaningful changes.

## **Exit interview questions to consider asking when an employee is leaving:**

- 1 What is one piece of constructive advice you have to offer the organization?
- 2 What recommendations do you have for the employer regarding supporting neurodivergent employees?
- 3 Did the employee ask for supports, or did the employer ask how they could support the employee?
- 4 Did the employer periodically review the adjustments they were providing for the employee? If yes, how often? If not, why not?
- 5 In what ways can the employer encourage open communication between employees and management regarding their support needs?



■■■ **NEUROinclusive**  
**Workforce Solutions**



Thank you for your interest in  
inclusive employment.  
Please see [worktopia.ca](https://worktopia.ca) for the full  
version of the Employer Toolkit.

