



Neuroinclusive Approaches to Employee Leave and Employee Separations

What is the Neuroinclusive Employment Project?

In partnership with the Sinneave Family Foundation, the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation is conducting research to explore how employers can create more neuroinclusive workplaces. The research aims to identify evidence-based practices and real-world examples that help employers support neurodivergent people and people living with disabilities to uncover opportunities to further improve workplace inclusion.

The following summary shares insights from the knowledge synthesis phase of research to help employers strengthen their capacity to foster inclusive workplaces. These evidence-based strategies and practices can help to increase employment opportunities and foster inclusion, with a special focus on neuroinclusion, in the workplace.

Creating fair and equitable transitions

The employee lifecycle (i.e., the key stages that include hiring, onboarding, promotion, etc.) includes different transitions and leaves, whether those are temporary or permanent. Neurodivergent employees often face unique, episodic challenges that may require flexible approaches to attendance or temporary leaves of absence. In addition, research shows that employer-initiated separations, like termination, can have a more significant negative impact on neurodivergent individuals, who often face greater job insecurity and may lack financial safety nets. Termination can also take a toll on their mental health.

Navigating transitions as an employer often surfaces their own feelings of risk and uncertainty. For example, research shows that some employers worry that firing neurodivergent employees could harm their reputation for inclusion, potentially leading them to avoid hiring these individuals in the first place. Instead, guidance for employers suggests that they can preserve their reputation by reviewing the end of the employee lifecycle for barriers to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion as well.



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Absence management and temporary leaves of absence

Neurodivergent individuals often face physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion in environments not designed for them, with periods of wellness alternating with instability. Traditional attendance policies can force them to disclose personal challenges, undermining feelings of safety, inclusion, and belonging in the workplace. To foster neuroinclusion, employers should consider flexible work hours, allow personal days, and offer extended sick leave or remote work options when feasible.

In cases where an employee must take a full break for personal or health reasons, workplace studies have found that inclusive employers often keep the door open for their return. Support during both their leave and re-entry is crucial, with options like a gradual return or part-time schedule easing the transition back to work.

Employee separation: the end of the employment lifecycle

Like any employee, neurodivergent individuals leave jobs for various reasons, whether due to finding different employment that is a better fit, pursuing long-term career goals, retraining, or focusing on their personal lives. However, when the separation is initiated by the employer, workplace studies highlight that having support from a service organization or trusted partner can help ensure a smoother, more positive exit process.

Regardless of whether separation is employer or employee-initiated, research shows that offering an exit interview is a promising practice to provide the employee an opportunity to share feedback. These insights can also help the employer identify areas for improvement. To be truly inclusive, employers should offer different exit interview formats—such as written or audio feedback—to accommodate diverse needs.

Interested in learning more about the evidence that informs these actions?
Check out the full Knowledge Synthesis report [here](#).

You can also click [here](#) to learn more about no-cost resources and services that can help you implement practical strategies and approaches to neurodiversity, equity, and inclusion.

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