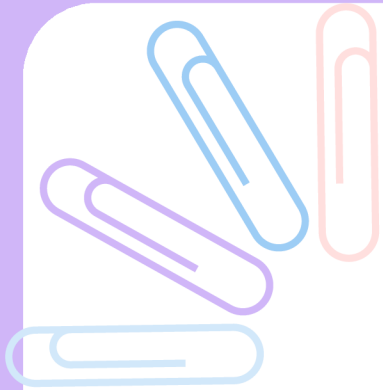


NEURODIVERGENCE AND SUPPORT OPTIONS



A self-help workbook from
ndhelp.co.uk 



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About

This workbook was created by two neurodivergent therapists. We hope you find it helpful as an introduction to neurodivergence and mental health. Please note this booklet is for informational purposes only and is not a substitute for medical advice.



What is Neurodivergence?

Neurodiversity refers to the different ways individuals interact with the world around them.

It is estimated around 15% (or 1 in 7) of people in the UK are **neurodivergent**, meaning their brain functions, learns and processes information differently to everyone else.



Different, not deficient

Being neurodivergent does not mean you have an illness or disease. These are not deficits to be “fixed” but simply differences in the way the brain works.

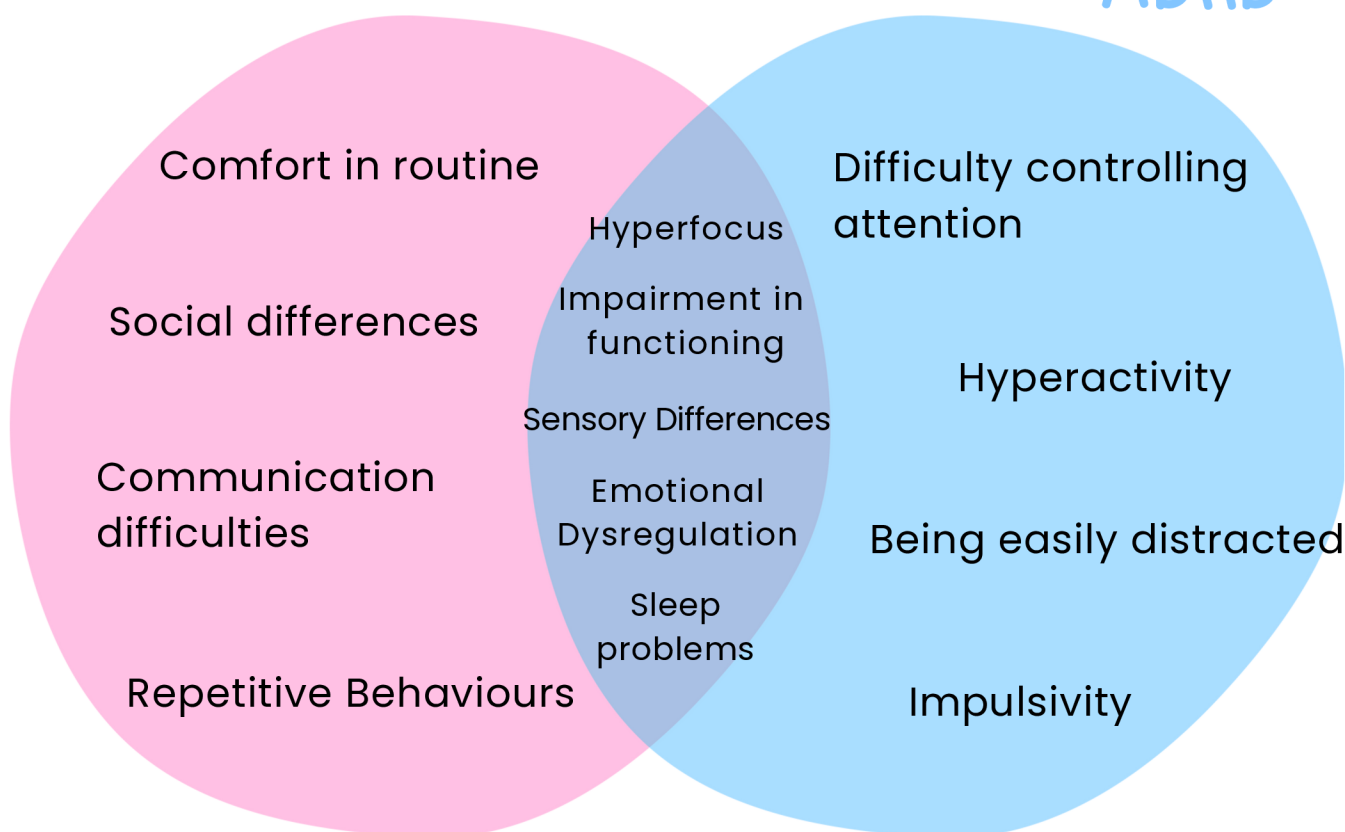
Autism and ADHD

Neurodivergence covers a wide spectrum of conditions.

In this workbook, we'll be focusing mainly on **Autism** (Autism Spectrum Disorder) and **ADHD** (Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder).

Autism

ADHD



*Diagnosis can only be carried out by a qualified professional. These symptoms are interpreted from the DSM V. For more information on how to obtain a diagnosis, please visit ndhelp.co.uk.

Mental Health Problems

Symptoms of neurodivergence can make everyday activities more challenging, especially in our fast-paced, hectic world.



Half of people with ADHD or Autism have an anxiety disorder



Autistic people are **four** times more likely to experience depression

While a diagnosis can be empowering in terms of positive attributes and skills, others find autism and ADHD increase their risk of experiencing common mental health problems such as **depression** and **anxiety**.

It is normal to experience changes in your mood sometimes – but if these changes are longstanding or affect your functioning, it could be the sign of depression or anxiety.

Withdrawing from loved ones

Loss of interest in things you enjoy

Feeling down, depressed or hopeless



Feeling nervous, anxious or on edge

Excessive Worry

Avoidance or behaviours to keep you safe

Support Options

Each person's needs and circumstances are unique, meaning support needs are individual. But it can be helpful to know some of the types of support out there.



Talking Therapy

Talking therapies are evidence-based and can help with common mental health problems, like anxiety, depression or OCD.



Medication

Some people find medication helpful to manage mental health issues. There are also medication options for ADHD - always discuss with your doctor first



Local Charities

In your local area there may be charities who offer information and support for divergence.



Peer Support

Speaking with other neurodivergent people can be helpful and validating.

Often the best place to start is a conversation with a GP aware of services in your area.



Talking Therapy

Talking Therapy is a Psychological Therapy available on the NHS and privately. Typically, this therapy will be Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) or person centred Counselling.

A Talking therapy might be suitable if...

...you are struggling with symptoms of **depression** or **anxiety**

...you would like to access **reasonable adjustments** to remove barriers around treatment

...you would like the option to **self-refer** without speaking to your GP

...you would like to access **free** treatment through the NHS or privately



Tip: You're not wasting anyone's time!

It's normal to be nervous – staff are trained to help you, so don't worry about what you're going to say. Make a few notes before the appointment if it would help.

You can usually refer online or over the telephone. If you're using the phone, all you will need to say is "I want to make a referral, please!"

If you don't get on with your therapist, you can request someone else – remember, your comfort is important!

A Talking therapy might not be suitable if...



...you would **struggle on a wait list** – refer sooner rather than later!

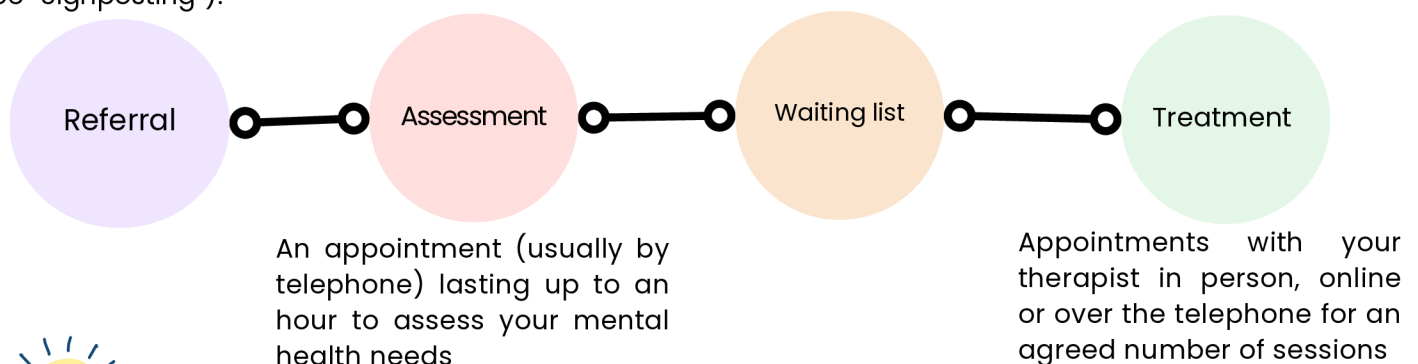
...you are **experiencing thoughts of harming yourself** –
there are more rapid support options to help keep you safe

...you are seeking **treatment for autism or ADHD**. Research suggests therapies such as CBT may help neurodivergent people to manage their difficulties, but there is no treatment – because neurodivergence is not an illness.

What to expect

Decide the service. Speak to your GP or use a website to locate your local service (see “Signposting”).

Placed on a waiting list for the recommended therapy (usually 6–18 weeks).



Tip: Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)

CBT is a psychological therapy that helps people to manage their problems by changing unhelpful thoughts and behaviours.

It is based on the idea that our thoughts, feelings, and behaviours are connected, so by changing one area we can change others too.



Medication

Starting medication is an important decision to be made with your doctor, but here is some information to consider...

Effective as part of a treatment plan. Research shows medication can help with the treatment of depression and anxiety, especially when used in combination with a talking therapy.

Range of medication available. Antidepressants called Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) are usually the first choice. This is because they generally have fewer side effects than most other types of antidepressants.



Tip: How SSRIs work

Serotonin is a chemical that carries messages between nerve cells in the brain and body to regulate mood, sleep, and digestion

SSRIs keep more serotonin active in the brain by preventing reabsorption, which can help relieve symptoms of depression and anxiety



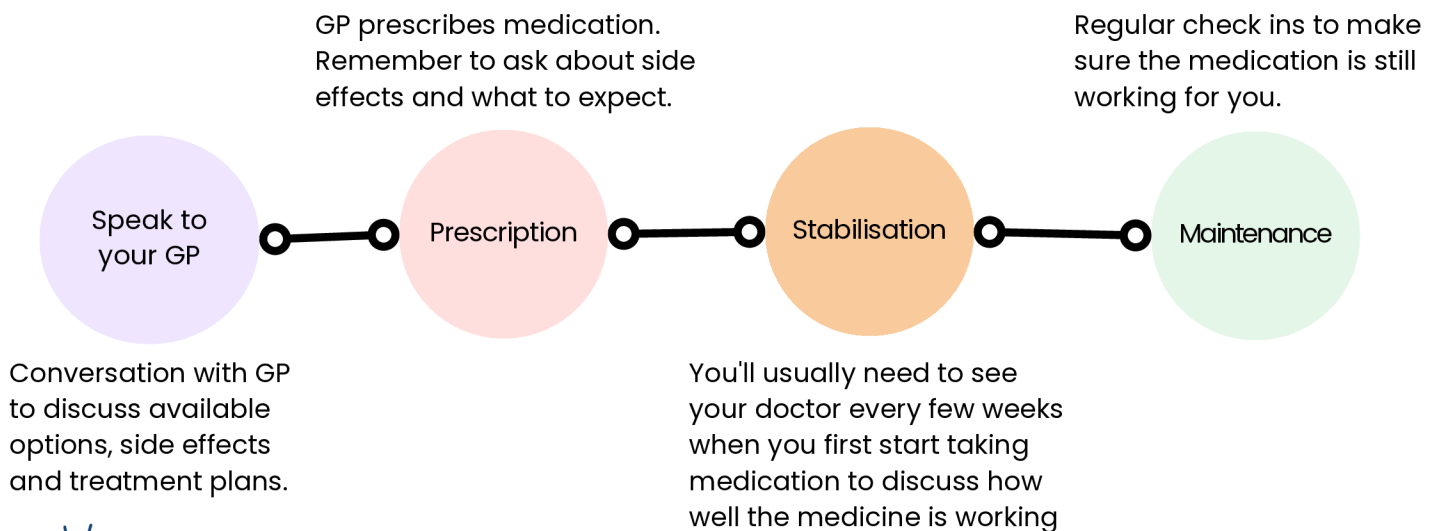
Not all medication works for everyone. Common side effects can include agitation, feeling shaky or anxious, diarrhoea, dizziness, blurred vision, and loss of libido (reduced sex drive)

Adjustment period. It takes time for your body to adjust (up to six weeks). Sometimes people have to try a few different medications and dosages before finding one that works for them



Taking medication is always a personal choice. To learn more about this form of support, you can visit www.nhs.uk or speak to your GP.

What to expect



Tip: Always take medication as prescribed

Some medication can make you feel worse before you feel better. Set a plan with your doctor or a supportive other for how you can be supported during this time.

Remember to always take medication as prescribed, and don't stop taking them suddenly – the side effects can be very unpleasant and dangerous.

Charities

There are many charities in the UK that support neurodivergent people (for a list of charities, see [Autism.org.uk](https://autism.org.uk) and [ADHDDUK.co.uk](https://adhd.uk)).

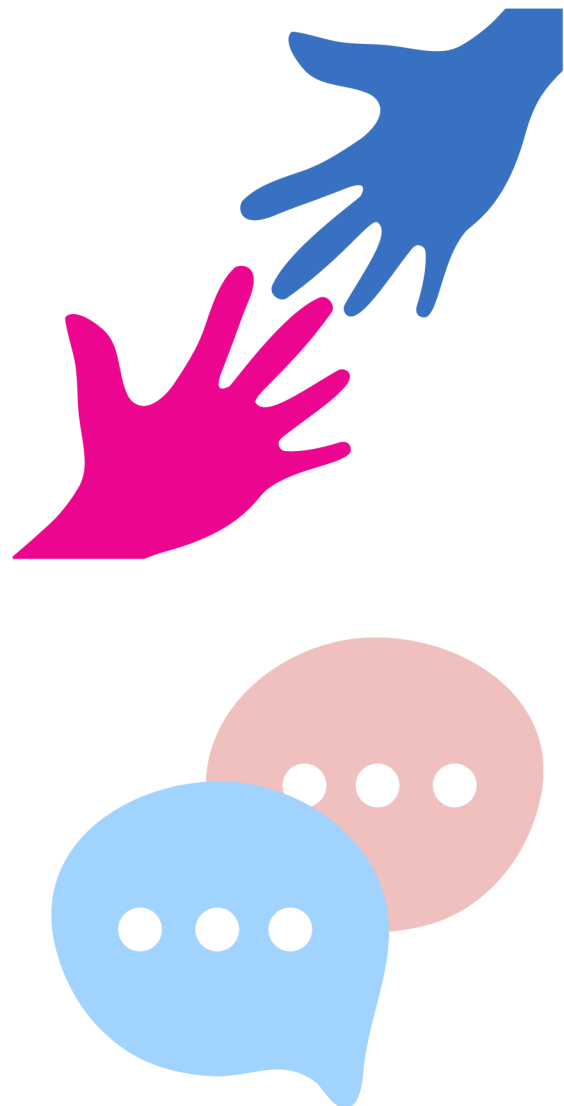
Why charity support may be suitable:

Range of Support. Charities can provide practical, emotional and social support

Accessible. Accessing support from a charity is free, and if they don't meet your needs, they can usually signpost you to other services in your area

Adjustable. You can usually contact charities by telephone, email or in person – whichever is easiest for you!

Community driven. Speaking to someone who understands your experiences can make you feel less alone



Tip: Keep an open mind

Don't be afraid to ask charities what to expect – there's often different processes for each organisation.

Most charities will offer different types of support. You might be surprised by what is out there – try to keep an open mind.

Explore your options! Speak to multiple charities to find the most suitable support for you.

When Charity support may not be suitable:

As a general rule, you can't access structured therapy through a charity and the NHS at the same time

Services available can differ a lot based on your area. Not all charities will deliver the same experience

Charities may be limited to what they provide based on funding and demand

There may be waiting lists!



What to expect

Most charities will have an email address or website, but you can also usually call and ask "what kind of support do you offer?"

Services can usually make adjustments to remove barriers to accessing support

Find charities

Initial contact

Discuss support

Engage

You can find charities online, via your GP and speaking to educational establishments, social prescribers or Citizens Advice.

Some charities will want to talk with you a little further to work out your support needs

Peer Support

Participating in a community of neurodivergent people can be validating and supportive

Peer support can help you reach other like minded individuals, who may share your experiences

Research shows being part of a community can help fight isolation which can improve mental health conditions



Usually you can find peer support communities in person or online, making them very accessible

When peer support may not be suitable:



It's important to keep in mind that peer support is not a substitute for professional mental healthcare.

If you are struggling with your mental health, formal support may be more appropriate

Stay safe online. Look for communities that are well moderated and vetted to ensure the environment is supportive

Finding peer support

- Peer support can often be found through local charities, who sometimes run social events where you and like minded peers can meet.
- Sometimes local schools, colleges and GP surgeries will be aware of peer support opportunities within the area
- Online communities can remove a lot of barriers that neurodivergent people face, such as anxiety from a face to face setting
- Online communities should be moderated to ensure the community is safe for all members

Tip: Stay safe online!

Remember to always be careful what personal information you disclose to people you don't know- especially online

Peer support can be helpful in combination with other types of support including therapy and medication

Online peer support can be a really good first option to try if you feel anxious in social situations

Reasonable Adjustments

Neurodiversity-affirming Care

The Equality Act defines a disability as an impairment that has a long-term effect and makes it harder to do everyday activities.

Autism and ADHD fall under this category as **protected characteristics**. This means organisations must make reasonable changes to enable equitable access to services.

examples of reasonable adjustments

(What counts as a “reasonable” adjustment will differ depending on the organisation but here are some examples)

Working together to identify your needs

Respecting your communication preferences

Accounting for sensory sensitivities

Sharing information to reduce uncertainty

If a characteristic is a barrier to you accessing support and you do not receive adjustments, this can count as discrimination under UK law.

Tip: A Shoe that Fits

Equality means treating everyone the same, despite unique circumstances, background, or challenges.

Equity means providing support based on individual needs to address systemic barriers faced by certain individuals or groups.

Equality is giving everyone a shoe. Equity is giving everyone a shoe that fits.



Examples of Reasonable Adjustments in Therapy

Therapists bring expertise in interventions, but you are the expert in your own experience. Based on your experiences, what support needs can you identify?

Barrier	Reason	Suggested reasonable adjustment
...struggling not knowing what to expect	Neurodivergent people can experience cognitive inflexibility, sensory sensitivity, and greater intolerance of uncertainty	Ask services to outline the typical processes e.g. send images of waiting rooms and locations you might visit
...difficulty remembering information	Everyone processes information differently but there is evidence autistic individuals process information more visually. ADHD can impact working memory, short-term and long-term memory, and information processing speeds.	Ask for information to be written down or emailed to you so you can focus on the session. Some people find it helpful to take notes during the session
...struggling to identify your emotions (the therapeutic term for this is Alexithymia)	Often neurodivergent individuals can have more difficulty than usual identifying how they feel, but this is a skill that can be developed and supported	Use an emotion wheel, or ask your supporter to explain emotions in different ways, like typical body sensations

Did you know...? *The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) recommends that therapy is adapted to suit the needs of neurodivergent individuals based on the available evidence.*

Barrier	Reason	Suggested reasonable adjustment
...difficulty going places alone	Ask for support to be delivered over the telephone or video, or ask if a supportive other can come with you to appointments	Being with a supportive other can help initially with helping you attend new places and you can always try going on your own after a few sessions
....struggling to sit still or concentrate for long periods of time	Ask for breaks in your sessions to stretch or move around. As long as it won't distract you, take a small fidget toy with you into sessions	Fidget devices and "movement breaks" can help refresh your attention and keep you focused
...being overstimulated by sensory input	Ask for rooms with soft lighting, in quiet areas. Ask to wait in a separate waiting area if available	Starting treatment overwhelmed is a barrier that services should help you overcome

Tip: Not just for therapy...

Many of the adjustments suggested above can be applied to other services – not just Talking Therapies.

If you are unsure of what would be a "reasonable" adjustment, there are services you can contact to find out (see Signposting)

Remember, all services are different and might vary in the type of adjustments they can offer.

Signposting

More Information

NHS.co.uk: A good place to start for information on neurodiversity, mental and physical health

National Autistic Society (Autism.org.uk): UK leading charity for information and research for autistic people

ADHDuk (adhduk.co.uk): UK's largest charity for information and research on ADHD



Additional Support

A good place to start could be your **GP** or **health centre** as they're likely to know local charities and support options

Local **colleges, libraries** or **universities** will also usually be familiar with this information

Internet searches for local support services for autism or ADHD can also point you in the right direction



Remember, contact 111 (option 2) if you are experiencing a mental health crisis or having thoughts of harming yourself, or 999 in an emergency.

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Found this helpful?

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ndhelp.co.uk

Remember: your needs are, and always have been, valid.