System Redesign Starter Pack

Principles for building ND-affirming environments across sectors

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Important note

This resource is intended to support understanding and good practice in neuro-inclusive workplace design. It provides general guidance and does not constitute legal, medical, or clinical advice. Organisations should apply the principles in line with their own policies, regulatory obligations, and professional judgement.

What this is

A **cross-sector design framework** for leaders and system designers who want neuro-inclusion to be **structural**, not optional or personality-dependent.

This pack translates ND-affirming values into **operational principles** that guide:

- service design
- pathway flow
- policy and governance
- workforce conditions
- digital systems
- physical environments

It applies equally to **NHS services, MATs, local authorities, employers, and commissioned providers**.

Why systems must be redesigned (not patched)

Most systems were built assuming:

- stable capacity
- high tolerance for uncertainty
- fast processing and response
- emotional neutrality under pressure

Neurodivergent people do not *fail* these systems.
They **expose their hidden assumptions**.

The result of not redesigning:

- failure demand
- escalation and crisis use
- burnout (service users *and* staff)
- disengagement framed as "non-compliance"
- legal, reputational, and ethical risk

The 10 Core ND-Affirming System Principles

1) Access Before Assessment

If people cannot enter safely, assessment accuracy is meaningless.

Design implications

- reduce load at entry points
- remove punitive non-attendance responses
- allow partial, paced disclosure
- provide support during waits

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2) Regulation Is Infrastructure

Regulation is not an individual skill… it is a **system output**.

Design implications

- predictable processes
- sensory-aware environments
- clear transitions
- low-threat communication norms

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3) Capacity Is Variable (Design for the Lowest Point)

Systems must work when capacity is *low*, not just at best functioning.

Design implications

- flexible pacing
- asynchronous options
- simplified decision points
- protection from overload cascades

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4) Predictability Reduces Harm More Than Reassurance

Uncertainty drives escalation faster than bad news.

Design implications

- explicit timelines (with ranges)
- clear "what happens next" signalling
- visible rules applied consistently
- fewer hidden thresholds

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5) Environment Shapes Behaviour More Than Motivation

What looks like behaviour is often an environmental response.

Design implications

- sensory audits as standard
- quiet / low-demand options
- reduced crowding and interruption
- environmental adjustments normalised

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6) Failure Demand Is a Design Signal

Repeated crises, DNAs, complaints, and re-referrals are **system feedback**.

Design implications

- map where people drop out or escalate
- redesign interfaces, not punish users
- reduce re-disclosure loops
- treat complaints as data, not noise

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7) Human Variability Is the Baseline

Standardisation should support *access*, not enforce sameness.

Design implications

- multiple ways to engage
- choice of communication modes
- alternatives to real-time performance
- opt-out pathways without penalty

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8) Workforce Regulation Enables Inclusion

Burned-out staff cannot deliver inclusive systems.

Design implications

- realistic caseloads
- clear authority and role boundaries
- regulation-aware training
- psychological safety for staff

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9) Policies Must Match Lived Reality

Policy that increases failure demand is not inclusive… even if well-intended.

Design implications

- test policies against ND experience
- remove punitive defaults
- align conduct, attendance, and performance policies with capacity science
- close the gap between written policy and practice

### 10) Inclusion Requires Accountability, Not Just Values

If no one owns it, it won't survive pressure.

Design implications

- measurable inclusion indicators
- board-level oversight
- clear escalation routes for access failures
- regular system review cycles

What ND-Affirming Systems Look Like in Practice

Across sectors, you'll see:

- fewer crisis escalations
- fewer DNAs and exclusions
- earlier support engagement
- improved retention (staff and users)
- clearer governance decisions
- lower long-term cost
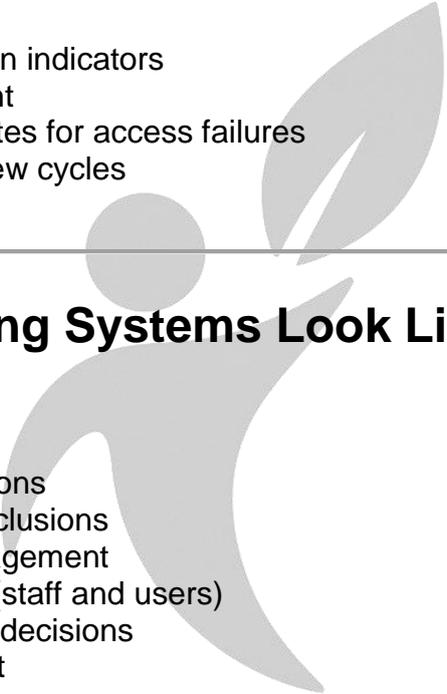
Not because people "try harder"…
but because **systems stop creating avoidable harm**.

Common redesign mistakes to avoid

- Training without system change
- Inclusion work dependent on one champion
- Expecting individuals to disclose to access safety
- Treating ND support as a specialist add-on
- Optimising throughput at the expense of access

These approaches **increase risk** over time.

How to use this Starter Pack

Service leads and designers can use it to:

- audit existing systems
- guide redesign workshops
- inform business cases and specs
- align multi-agency work
- create a shared language across teams

It works best when paired with:

- the **Neuro Inclusion Index**
- **failure demand mapping**
- **NdCare 360 pathway design**

Bottom line for leaders

Neuro-inclusion is not about making systems nicer.

It is about making them **work properly…**
for the full range of human nervous systems they already serve.

When systems are ND-affirming by design:

- fewer people break down
- fewer staff burn out
- fewer resources are wasted
- and outcomes improve across the board

This Starter Pack gives you the **principles** to begin that redesign…
before harm becomes crisis.