



# **ND-Friendly Communication Guide**

*Clear frameworks to reduce miscommunication, overwhelm,  
and escalation*

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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.

Communication problems in neurodivergent workplaces are often framed as interpersonal issues.

In reality, they are usually **design issues**.

Unclear expectations, ambiguous language, sudden changes, and emotionally loaded feedback create unnecessary nervous system strain... particularly for neurodivergent people, but ultimately for everyone.

This guide offers **clear, practical communication frameworks** designed to reduce confusion, anxiety, misinterpretation, and emotional escalation.

It is not about policing tone.  
It is about **making meaning legible**.

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## How to use this guide

You do not need to apply everything at once.

Use this guide to:

- audit existing communication habits
- redesign templates and norms
- support managers and teams
- reduce conflict without suppressing honesty

Neuro-friendly communication is not about being softer.

It is about being **clear, predictable, and explicit**.

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## Core principle: clarity before interpretation

Many communication breakdowns occur because people are expected to:

- infer priorities
- guess tone or intent
- read between the lines
- translate vague feedback into action

For many neurodivergent people, this creates:

- cognitive overload
- anxiety
- delayed responses
- emotional escalation

ND-friendly communication reduces interpretation load by **making expectations explicit**.

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# 1. Emails

*Reducing ambiguity, urgency spirals, and cognitive overload*

Emails are one of the most common sources of stress... not because of volume alone, but because of **unclear intent**.

## ND-friendly email principles

- One main purpose per email
- Clear subject lines that reflect action required
- Explicit expectations (what, when, who)
- Neutral tone without implied urgency
- Scannable structure

## Recommended email structure

### Subject line:

State the purpose clearly

“Action needed: Review document by Friday”

“For information: Project update”

### Opening line:

Why the email exists

“This email is to confirm next steps for...”

### Body:

- What is happening
- What is needed (if anything)
- By when
- Any relevant context

### Close:

Explicit reassurance if appropriate

“No immediate action needed.”

“Let me know if anything is unclear.”

### Avoid:

- Vague subjects (“Quick question”, “Thoughts?”)
  - Multiple requests buried in one message
  - Implied urgency without timelines
  - Emotional tone doing the work of clarity
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## 2. Instructions

*Making tasks actionable, not overwhelming*

Many ND people struggle not with competence, but with **translation...** turning abstract or high-level instructions into concrete steps.

### ND-friendly instruction principles

- Explicit outcomes
- Clear scope
- Stepwise structure
- Visible priorities

### Better instruction framework

Instead of:

“Can you take ownership of this and move it forward?”

Use:

- **Goal:** What does “done” look like?
- **Scope:** What is and isn’t included?
- **Steps:** What happens first, second, third?
- **Deadline:** When is this needed?
- **Check-in:** How should questions be raised?

Example:

“The goal is to produce a 2-page summary. Please draft an outline by Wednesday, then we’ll review together before finalising on Friday. Let me know if you need clarification on scope.”

### Avoid:

- Assuming shared understanding
  - “Use your initiative” without boundaries
  - Moving goalposts mid-task without explanation
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# 3. Feedback

*Reducing threat while increasing usefulness*

Feedback is one of the most common escalation points for neurodivergent people... not because feedback is unwelcome, but because it is often **ambiguous, emotionally loaded, or poorly timed.**

## ND-friendly feedback principles

- Specific, not global
- Behaviour-focused, not character-based
- Balanced with context
- Actionable

## Safer feedback structure

### 1. Context

“I want to give feedback on yesterday’s presentation.”

### 2. Observation (concrete)

“The data section was clear, but the timeline slide caused confusion.”

### 3. Impact

“A few stakeholders weren’t sure what the next step was.”

### 4. Adjustment

“Adding a clear ‘Next steps’ slide would help.”

### 5. Reassurance (where appropriate)

“This is about clarity, not performance concerns.”

## Avoid:

- “You always / never” language
- Vague criticism (“be more confident”)
- Delivering feedback during high stress
- Assuming emotional resilience equals safety

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# 4. Meetings

### *Reducing cognitive load and social ambiguity*

Meetings are often exhausting not because of length, but because of **unstructured interaction and unclear expectations**.

### **ND-friendly meeting principles**

- Predictability
- Preparation
- Clear purpose
- Optional participation modes

### **Better meeting design**

Before the meeting:

- Share agenda in advance
- Clarify goals (“decision, discussion, update”)
- Identify required vs optional attendance

During the meeting:

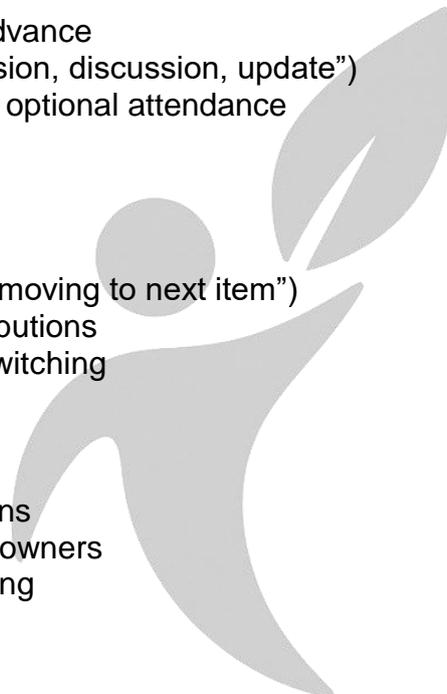
- Stick to agenda
- Name transitions (“moving to next item”)
- Allow written contributions
- Avoid rapid topic-switching

After the meeting:

- Summarise decisions
- Clarify actions and owners
- Share notes in writing

### **Avoid:**

- “Let’s just see where it goes”
- Surprise topics
- Reading silence as agreement
- Equating participation with verbal dominance



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## **5. Performance Reviews**

### *Making expectations legible instead of threatening*

Performance reviews are high-stakes environments for neurodivergent nervous systems... especially when expectations are implicit or shifting.

## ND-friendly review principles

- Transparency
- Predictability
- Separation of performance from identity
- Clear pathways forward

## Safer performance review structure

### 1. Scope

“This review covers the last six months and focuses on role expectations.”

### 2. What’s working

- Be specific
- Name strengths clearly

### 3. What needs adjustment

- Link to role requirements
- Avoid moral framing

### 4. Support & adjustments

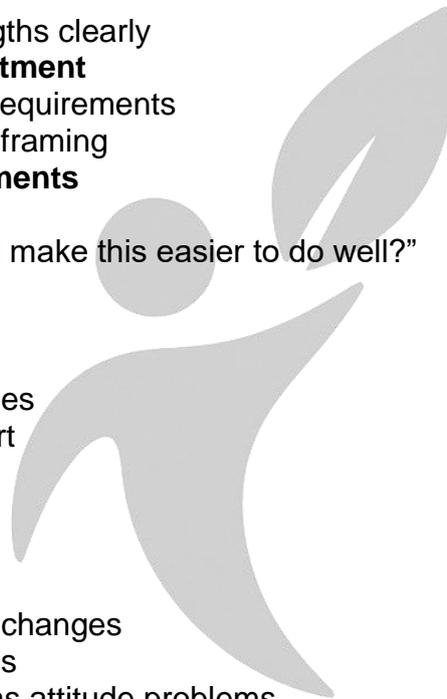
“What would make this easier to do well?”

### 5. Next steps

- Clear goals
- Clear timelines
- Clear support

## Avoid:

- Surprises
- Retrospective goal changes
- Implicit comparisons
- Framing ND traits as attitude problems



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## What ND-friendly communication prevents

When communication is clear and predictable, organisations see:

- fewer misunderstandings
- reduced emotional escalation
- faster resolution of issues
- improved trust
- better performance consistency

This is not about lowering standards.

It is about **removing unnecessary friction.**

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## A final note

Neuro-friendly communication is not about speaking more carefully.

It is about **designing communication so people don't have to guess what you mean.**

Clarity is not cold.  
Explicitness is not unkind.  
Structure is not control.

For many neurodivergent people, clarity is safety.

And safety is what allows people to do their best work.

