



Teacher Communication Guide (ND Lens)

What to say, what not to say, and how to avoid misattunement

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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 is not just information transfer.
For ND students, it is a nervous-system experience.*

This guide supports **clear, safe communication** that improves learning access without lowering expectations.

Why communication matters more than content

Many ND students:

- process language more slowly or non-linearly
- experience heightened threat sensitivity (e.g. RSD)
- struggle when meaning is implied rather than explicit
- shut down when put on the spot or corrected publicly

Misattunement often looks like:

- silence
- avoidance
- missed work
- emotional reactions
- “inconsistency”

These are usually **access issues**, not motivation problems.

Core communication principles (ND lens)

1. **Clarity reduces anxiety**
2. **Tone carries more weight than intent**
3. **Predictability increases participation**
4. **Privacy preserves dignity**
5. **Processing time is not resistance**

Hold these before choosing your words.

What *helps* ND students feel safe to engage

1. Name expectations explicitly

Say

- “You don’t need to answer out loud unless you want to.”

- “This is a draft... not a final version.”
- “We’re exploring ideas, not assessing right now.”

Avoid

- “You know what I mean.”
- “Just have a go.”
- “It’s obvious.”

Implicit expectations increase threat.

2. Separate behaviour from identity

Say

- “This piece of work is incomplete.”
- “The deadline was missed.”

Avoid

- “You’re not trying.”
- “You’re disengaged.”
- “You don’t care.”

ND students often internalise feedback deeply.

3. Use private correction whenever possible

Say (quietly / 1:1)

- “Can I check something with you after class?”
- “I want to help you get back on track.”

Avoid

- calling out mistakes publicly
- correcting tone or body language in front of peers

Public correction often triggers shutdown or RSD.

4. Allow processing time

Say

- “I’ll give everyone a minute to think.”
- “You can respond in writing if that’s easier.”
- “We can come back to you.”

Avoid

- rapid questioning
- filling silence with pressure
- interpreting pause as lack of understanding

Silence is often **processing**, not avoidance.

What *not* to say (common misattunement triggers)

These phrases often escalate threat even when well-intended:

- “Calm down.”
- “You’re overthinking this.”
- “This shouldn’t be hard.”
- “Everyone else understands.”
- “You just need to focus.”
- “Try harder.”

They communicate *judgement*, not support.

How to give instructions (ND-safe)

Do:

- give one instruction at a time
- repeat key points in writing
- state deadlines clearly
- show examples or models
- say what *not* to do if relevant

Avoid:

- multi-step verbal instructions only
- last-minute changes without explanation
- vague language (“soon,” “later,” “a bit”)

Clarity supports independence.

Feedback language that reduces shutdown

Start with safety

- “This is about the work, not you.”
- “You’re not in trouble.”

Be specific

- “This paragraph needs a clearer conclusion.”

End with direction

- “Next step: add one sentence summarising your argument.”

Avoid sandwiching criticism between vague praise... it creates confusion.

If a student shuts down or becomes emotional

What helps

- pause the interaction
- lower your voice
- reduce demands
- offer choice (“We can talk later”)
- maintain calm, neutral presence

What doesn’t help

- insisting on immediate explanation
- continuing the lesson as if nothing is happening
- escalating authority

Regulation comes before learning.

Repairing misattunement (when it happens)

Misattunement is inevitable. Repair matters more.

Say

- “I think I missed something earlier.”
- “That might have landed harder than I intended.”
- “Let’s reset.”

This models safety and accountability.

Signs your communication is working

You may notice:

- more consistent engagement
- fewer emotional escalations
- increased questions or clarification requests
- earlier disclosure of difficulty
- improved trust

These are system outcomes, not personality changes.

Gentle reminders for educators

- ND students often work *harder* to appear fine
 - Behaviour is often communication
 - You don't need perfect words... just regulated presence
 - Small shifts in language have large effects
 - Access is not advantage
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Bottom line

ND-affirming communication is not about being softer.

It's about being **clearer, calmer, and more precise...**
so students can access learning without fear.

When communication feels safe,
students don't need to protect themselves from it.

That's when learning becomes possible.