

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a disability?

The Americans with Disability Act of 1990 (ADA) broadly defines a person with a disability as:

"A person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, has a record of such an impairment, or is perceived by others as having such an impairment, including individuals who do not have an impairment but are regarded as having one (ex: cancer is in remission)."

Is Autism considered a disability?

Autism is a social, communication condition. Much like other conditions, disorders or disabilities that can have an adverse societal impact on a person, autism is provided protections under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

What does "neurodiversity" mean?

"Neurodiversity" is a term originally coined by autistic sociologist Judith Singer in her thesis published in the early 1990s. The neurodiversity paradigm set out by Singer states that there is naturally occurring cognitive diversity in the human biosphere, just as there are different races and genders. Originally intended to include only those with autism, the neurodiversity model has recently been expanded to include other cognitive differences such as ADHD and dyslexia. A person with one of these conditions is referred to as "neurodivergent" and a group of people that include neurodivergent individuals is described as "neurodiverse."

I don't want to say the wrong thing or inadvertently come across as discriminatory. Any tips?

Those with autism tend to identify with their autism in different ways, so it's understandable to have concerns about saying the wrong thing. First, it's important to only mention a person's neurodivergence if it's relevant to the conversation. If you happen to find yourself in a position where you need to, start by admitting that you aren't sure what to say, then ask them what terms they prefer (ie., "person with autism," "autistic," or "neurodivergent"). Once they tell you, do your best to respect their preferences going forward. But if you do make a mistake, just apologize and move on. Your vulnerability and sincerity will help build trust, honesty and a sense of equality.

If I think someone has autism or another form of neurodivergence, can I ask them?

No, you cannot initiate a conversation about someone's neurodivergence or any disability, even if it is visible. Someone may disclose their neurodivergence to you. At that point, you can have conversation about it

What should I do if someone discloses their autism or neurodivergence to me?

Thank them! Disclosing is a very personal and difficult thing to do. If they do disclose their autism or neurodivergence to you, this means they trust you professionally and personally with that information. Remember, just because they disclosed to you doesn't give you the right to tell anyone else without their permission. Your knowledge of their condition should be considered confidential information until the person says otherwise.

What can I do to be an ally to my autistic/neurodivergent co-workers?

It is great that you care and want to help. First, treat them the same as you would any other co-worker. Make them feel welcome by introducing yourself, initiating conversations with them, and implicitly inviting them to work functions. Do not take offense if they do something unusual, such as not responding when you greet them. Understand that neurodivergent individuals who communicate and act differently and are not being rude or aloof. Tip: Most times the best help is patience and empathy.

What if I the person seems upset, or is acting unusually, or appears to need help?

Insert yourself into the situation. Ask if they are okay. Ask if you can be of assistance, but don't help unless they ask specifically for it. They may want to handle it themselves, even if they are struggling. If they do request help, seek guidance from them about the best way to do that. Escalate a need to the appropriate person for resolution. Contact emergency personnel if needed.

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Important Terms

Talent	New hire with autism, other neurodivergence or a disability	Disclose	Act of telling someone you have autism, neurodivergence, or a disability
Buddy	Talent who is engaged in a Peer Buddy relationship	Accommodation	Something that helps an autistic or neurodivergent person work better
Peer Buddy	Pfizer Support Team Member who is matched to a Buddy to provide guidance and initial support	Universal Design	Supports that are accessible and beneficial to all people
Mentor	Pfizer Support Team Member who supports to Buddy and Peer Buddy	Natural Support	Established internal support
Champion	Someone who promotes hiring Talent with autism or neurodivergence	Job Coach	External resource for someone who may need more significant employment supports

What is my role as a Peer Buddy?

Think of yourself as a work friend, a natural support. You are there to show your Buddy "the ropes" around the office or virtually. You are your Buddy's first point of contact. Help them become comfortable in the company. Network and introduce them to others. Be accessible when they request help. Be a Champion!

What is the role of a Mentor?

Mentors have two roles. Provide support and guidance to the Peer Buddy and provide professional development to the talent. A Mentor should also be a Champion and promote the program throughout the company.

What if I don't know anything about autism or other forms of neurodivergence?

No problem. **Pfizer** will provide training for you to learn more about autism and other types of neurodivergence and how to best support neurodivergent individuals. The major prerequisite is that you will care about your Buddy, be committed to their success, and provide positive guidance.

What should I do if my Buddy tells me they want an accommodation?

This means your Buddy recognizes that they need a resource that will help them perform their job's required standards or to perform better. Most accommodations are "no-cost" accommodations. Requests like not sitting near high traffic areas because it distracts them from their work; or not being on video during virtual meetings because it heightens a sensory sensitivity and makes it difficult to focus on their work. Share their request with their manager and advocate on their behalf, if needed.

How can I provide better support to my Buddy?

Seek to use universal design when providing support or guidance; things that would help any new employee such as simple checklists or an org chart, preferably one with pictures! Who wouldn't like to see the faces of their co-workers next to their names when getting familiar with a new team? Additional tips: Initiate conversations about their areas of interest and make sure to implicitly invite them to work functions. Most importantly, Smile and be positive.

What if my Buddy has an external support?

If needed, your Buddy may have a job coach or interpreter working with them. That's okay. They are supporting your Buddy for different needs than you. You can talk with the support, but remember to always address your Buddy, not their support when asking questions or engaging with your Buddy.

Want to learn more about the Pfizer SourceAble Program or have positions considered for SourceAble talent? Contact contact@sourceabled.com

Peer Buddy Engagement Tips

Do Not

- ❌ Do not make promises you cannot keep.
- ❌ Do not fixate (staring, awkwardly avoiding or referring to it during conversations, etc.) on your Buddy's neurodivergence, even if your Buddy does or if they refer to it as a "superpower." This is poor etiquette.
- ❌ Do not explain something to your buddy in a condescending or patronizing manner. Do not assume that communication differences like pauses in speech or use of an assistive communication device means that they are less intelligent.
- ❌ Do not do your Buddy's work. Provide direction or guidance but let them learn to do the work.
- ❌ Do not treat them like a personal assistant. They have a job to do, just like you.
- ❌ Do not talk to your Buddy as if they are a child. Speak to them the way you would talk to any co-worker. Tone of your voice and cadence of your delivery matters.
- ❌ Do not interpret lack of enthusiasm as laziness or rudeness on their part or that you are doing something wrong. Your Buddy may struggle with expressing appreciation or may have a flat affect as part of their communication style.
- ❌ Do not take offense if your Buddy does not want to engage in something you suggest. Instead encourage them offer an alternative suggestions or allow them to participate at a level they are comfortable.

It's okay if...

- 👍 It's okay if you are nervous. They probably are too! Use it as a point of conversation.
- 👍 It's okay if you do not have an immediate connection with your Buddy or if your attempts to interact seem to fall flat or are very brief. Keep trying. They appreciate your efforts, even if they aren't able to express that to you.
- 👍 It's okay if you do not know all the answers to the questions your Buddy may ask. If you don't, find it out and get back to them.
- 👍 It's okay, you are human. You will probably make a mistake. So will they. Learn together and move on.
- 👍 It's okay if you don't know the right way to address your Buddy or how to refer to their autism or neurodivergence. Be a little vulnerable and ask them. They will tell you what they prefer. But only bring it up if its relevant to the conversation.
- 👍 It's okay if you don't think you are the world's best buddy. Care about your Buddy. Be there for them and be committed. Buddy relationships aren't always smooth or easy, but they are important.