



ADHD at Work

How to advocate for your needs at work without shame – and why ADHD brains need support, structure and clarity to thrive

Many ADHD adults struggle in workplaces that were never designed with neurodivergent people in mind. You're expected to be organised, consistent, calm, responsive, punctual and able to multitask- all day, every day.

These expectations clash with how ADHD brains work. That doesn't make you irresponsible. It makes the workplace inaccessible.

This guide helps you understand why work is hard, how ADHD impacts daily functioning, and how to advocate for the adjustments that help you thrive.

Why Work Can Be Exhausting for ADHD Adults

Workplaces usually expect:

- perfect memory
- immediate processing
- consistent focus
- emotional neutrality
- clear communication
- flawless planning
- time management
- tidy organisation
- responding under pressure
- coping with change

ADHD impacts every single one of those areas.

You are not “bad at work”. You are operating in a system that assumes a neurotypical brain.

What ADHD at Work Can Look Like

You may recognise:

Overwhelm from too many tasks

Your brain freezes when priorities aren't clear or when everything feels equally urgent.

Forgetting instructions even when you're trying hard

Working memory isn't a moral issue — it's neurological.

Masking to appear “professional”

This leads to burnout, exhaustion and hiding your needs.

Emotional intensity in stressful situations

You may feel you “care too much”, react quickly, or take things personally.

Struggling with transitions

Switching tasks, leaving deep-focus mode, or restarting after interruptions is difficult.

Difficulty with admin-heavy tasks

Emails, forms, filing, documentation, updating systems — all drain executive functioning.

RSD (Rejection Sensitivity)

Feedback, tone changes or uncertainty can feel like personal failure.

Inconsistency that gets misinterpreted

Your best days and worst days can look completely different — which leads to unfair judgments.

None of this means you are unprofessional. It means your brain needs a different working environment.

Why Speaking Up at Work Is Hard

Many ADHD adults fear:

- being judged
- disappointing people
- looking incapable
- being treated differently
- being seen as a problem
- getting in trouble
- losing their job
- having emotions misunderstood

Add in emotional dysregulation, freeze responses, and shame from past negative experiences— advocacy becomes overwhelming.

But your needs are not unreasonable. They are normal adjustments that make work accessible.

Reasonable Adjustments That Help ADHD Brains Thrive

Here are adjustments many workplaces can offer — and you are legally entitled to ask for them if you're disabled or neurodivergent.

- Clear written instructions
- Tasks broken down into steps
- Advance notice for changes
- Longer deadlines or flexible timelines
- Quiet workspace or noise-reducing tools
- Reduced admin or support with paperwork
- Regular check-ins or one-to-one structure
- Visual reminders or task lists
- Flexible working hours where possible
- Permission to use tools (timers, apps, notes)
- Written summaries of meetings
- Support with organisation

These aren't "special treatment". They are accessibility tools.

How to Advocate for Your Needs at Work

Here are gentle ADHD-friendly scripts and approaches.

If you need clearer instructions:

"Could you put the main steps in writing? It helps me stay organised."

If you need slower communication:

"I process better when things are broken down — could we go through it in smaller steps?"

If you need predictability:

"I work best with advance notice. Could you let me know changes as early as possible?"

If you need support with prioritising:

"What needs doing first? What can wait?"

If you need quiet:

"Noise affects my concentration. Is there a quieter area or can I use headphones?"

If time pressure overwhelms you:

"I can do this well with a bit more time — could we adjust the deadline?"

Scripts help lower the emotional load of speaking up.

How to Handle Difficult Conversations

These steps make advocacy less overwhelming:

1. Prepare your key points

One sentence is enough:

"The main thing I need help with is _____."

2. Use written communication when possible

Emails create clarity and remove pressure.

3. Ask for a supportive person to attend

Someone who can help regulate and keep you grounded.

4. Use the “Pause + Process” method

It’s okay to say: “I need to think about that and come back to you.”

5. Set boundaries around overwhelm

Examples: “I can continue this conversation after a break.” **or** “Can we focus on one issue at a time?”

Boundaries protect your nervous system.

How Employers Can Support ADHD Employees

Supportive behaviours:

- speaking clearly and calmly
- breaking information into steps
- offering reminders or written follow-up
- being flexible with deadlines when possible
- understanding inconsistency is neurological
- giving structure without micromanaging
- asking “What would help you here?”

Unhelpful behaviours:

- assuming laziness
- expecting instant responses
- rushing through instructions
- overloading with tasks
- criticising tone or communication style
- last-minute changes without warning

Good management = accessibility + compassion.

Takeaways

- ADHD affects memory, processing, emotions and communication — so workplace challenges are not laziness or lack of effort.
 - You are allowed to ask for adjustments that support your brain.
 - Self-advocacy doesn’t need confidence — just clarity and safety.
 - With small changes, ADHD adults can thrive at work.
 - You deserve a workplace that understands, supports and values you.
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You Deserve Understanding, Not Pressure

You're not being difficult by asking for support- you're asking for accessibility.
Your needs are valid and you deserve a workplace where you can thrive, not survive.

If you ever need help preparing for a meeting, writing an email, advocating for adjustments or understanding your rights, Unmasked is here to support you.

You don't have to do it alone.

CONTACT US

Unmasked Neurodiversity Network CIC

A lived-experience-led community organisation supporting neurodivergent adults and families across East Leeds and West Yorkshire.

If you need support, information, counselling, advocacy or a safe, neuro-affirming space, we're here for you.

Email Us

For general enquiries, referrals, appointments or support:

info@unmaskednn.org

Follow Us on Social Media

Stay updated with groups, events, workshops, blogs, and resources:

- **Facebook Page:** Unmasked Neurodiversity Network CIC
 - **Facebook Community Group:** Unmasked Neurodiversity Network CIC
 - **Instagram:** @unmasked_nn_cic
 - **LinkedIn:** Unmasked Neurodiversity Network CIC
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Phone Contact

If you need help getting in touch or cannot email, you can request a call-back via email or through our website contact form.

How We Work

Unmasked is led by trained neurodivergent counsellors and facilitators.

We offer:

- Low-cost and funded counselling
- Support groups and peer spaces
- Creative workshops and community cafés

- Advocacy and guidance (including Access to Work, benefits, workplace support and more)
- Training for organisations and professionals
- Resources designed by and for neurodivergent adults

All profits are reinvested into helping our community.

Accessibility

We are committed to making our services accessible — including communication support, written information, pacing, sensory consideration, and advocacy assistance. If you need adjustments, let us know and we'll do our best to meet them.

Final Note

You are welcome here — exactly as you are.

If you need support, guidance or just a safe place to talk, Unmasked is here for you.

Love Toni & Sarah x