

LEVEL THE FIELD

Working for a more equitable farming industry

AUGUST 2025
fwi.co.uk/level-the-field

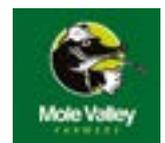


PARTNERS



Frontier

SUPPORTERS



A comprehensive guide to

Neurodiversity-friendly communication

Why it matters and practical ways farming businesses can embrace it

WHAT IS NEURODIVERSE COMMUNICATION?

BENEFITS OF INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATION

COMMUNICATION STYLES

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

TOOLS AND TEMPLATES



What is neurodiverse communication?

Communication is the lifeblood of any farm, whether you're managing staff, co-ordinating harvests, working with suppliers or collaborating with family. However, not everyone communicates in the same way – and that's not a bad thing.

Some people might absorb information differently or express themselves in ways that aren't immediately familiar. These differences aren't always noticeable, but they can have a profound impact on how someone interacts with others, especially in the workplace.

Neurodivergent individuals – including people with autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, Tourette's syndrome and others – may experience and express communication differently. Without awareness, these differences could lead to misunderstandings or even exclusion. According to [Farmers Weekly's Level the Field](#) survey, 59% of respondents reported that their neurodivergence had a negative impact on their communication and social interactions. This was the most reported challenge among all the listed options, and it is a clear sign that communication barriers are both real and deeply felt in agricultural communities.

Peer to peer clarity

But here's something many people don't realise: neurodivergent individuals often communicate more effectively with each other than with neurotypical people. Guidance from the [National Autistic Society](#) notes that autistic people often report greater rapport, flow and empathy when interacting with other autistic people than they do with non-autistic people.

[A 2020 study](#) backs this up. It found that communication between autistic people was just as effective, or even more so, than between neurotypical pairs. Communication breakdowns were most likely when neurodivergent and neurotypical individuals interacted.

This idea is at the heart of what researchers call the "double empathy problem" – the



WHAT IS NEURODIVERSE COMMUNICATION?

BENEFITS OF INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATION

COMMUNICATION STYLES

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

TOOLS AND TEMPLATES



premise that communication issues don't stem solely from neurodivergent individuals, but from mutual misunderstandings between people with different ways of thinking and experiencing the world.

"Traditionally, the pressure to adapt communication styles has fallen on neurodivergent individuals," says Anima Nair, head of neurodiversity initiatives at Interweave Consulting.

"But both neurotypical and neurodivergent people need to find common ground. Through nurturing transparent communication and cultivating shared understanding, we can forge stronger connections and establish a world that is more inclusive and welcoming for all."

Common communication traits

Here are some behaviours you might notice in neurodivergent individuals.

Autism

- May avoid eye contact – not out of rudeness, but because it can feel overwhelming
- Might prefer clear, direct instructions – no need to read between the lines
- Might take a few extra seconds to respond – that's just processing time

ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder)

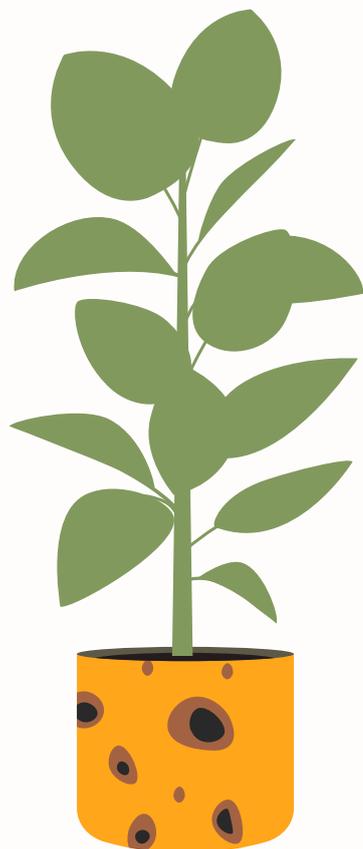
- Might jump between topics or interrupt – this can be sparked by excitement, not disrespect
- Could perceive long conversations as being difficult to follow – keep it clear and to the point
- May seem distracted – but often thinking in a different, creative way

Dyslexia and dyspraxia

- Reading or writing might be a challenge
- Visual tools like diagrams, checklists or taskboards can be helpful

Tourette's syndrome

- May have involuntary movements or sounds (tics). These don't mean the person isn't paying attention or doesn't understand
- Tics may interrupt speech, but don't affect comprehension; they are part of how their body works



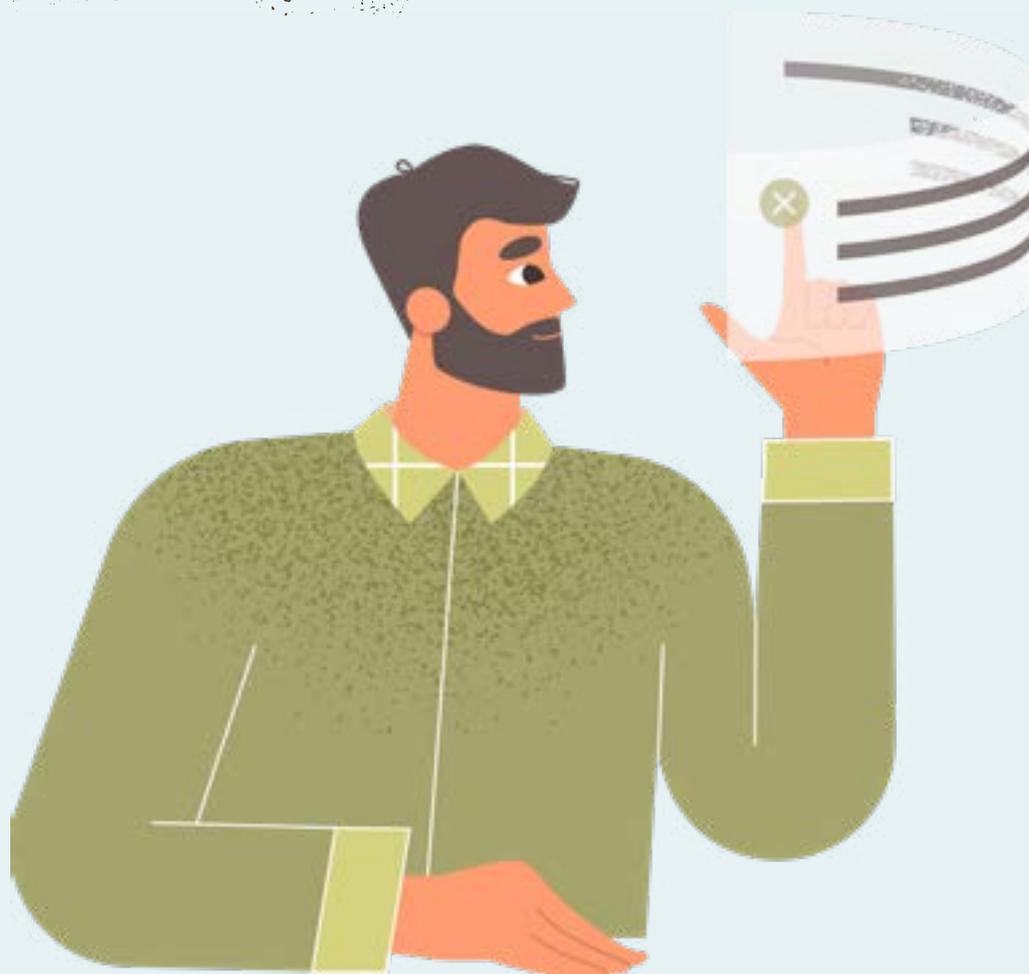
WHAT IS NEURODIVERSE COMMUNICATION?

BENEFITS OF INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATION

COMMUNICATION STYLES

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

TOOLS AND TEMPLATES



Benefits of inclusive communication

Farming today is more collaborative than ever. From multifunctional farms to agri-tourism and diversified enterprises, communication is key to making it all run smoothly. Creating spaces where neurodivergent individuals can thrive is not only the right thing to do, but also a smart business move.

Attract and keep good people

When you support different ways of thinking and communicating, your business becomes a place where people feel welcome and valued. A neurodiversity-friendly approach helps attract talented individuals who might otherwise be overlooked and makes them more likely to stay, because they feel supported and understood.

Better teamwork, less stress

Clearer communication reduces misunderstandings. Whether that means using visual aids, offering written instructions or giving someone more time to respond, minor adjustments can make a big difference to how smoothly your team works together.

Fresh ideas and better problem-solving

Neurodivergent team members often bring unique perspectives, sharp focus and creative problem-solving skills. That can help your farm find innovative solutions, improve processes, and adapt to challenges season after season.



WHAT IS NEURODIVERSE COMMUNICATION?

BENEFITS OF INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATION

COMMUNICATION STYLES

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

TOOLS AND TEMPLATES



Creating safety through conversation

Clear instructions and good communication on the farm are key, but what happens when the conversation goes deeper than daily tasks?

Amanda Kirby and Anne Cockayne, co-authors of [Neurodiversity at Work](#), remind us that good communication isn't just about what we say, it's about creating the conditions where people feel safe enough to speak honestly in the first place.

For neurodivergent workers, opening up about how they work best or what they find difficult can be a huge decision. Past experiences of being misunderstood or even bullied can make it hard to trust that being open will lead to support rather than judgment. Some people may not want to share personal information, and that's their right.

This doesn't mean managers or team leaders need to have all the answers or even know someone's diagnosis. What matters more is building relationships based on mutual respect and curiosity. Small, thoughtful conversations. For example:

- “Is there a way I can support you better?”
- “Would it help to try a different approach?”
- “Is this task working well for you, or would a change help?”

Amanda and Anne's research found that what mattered most wasn't the size of the workplace or the number of policies, it was the quality of the relationship between the manager and the person they were managing.

Most managers wanted to do the right thing but sometimes didn't know how. Others were so afraid of “getting it wrong” that they avoided the conversation altogether.

When people feel safe enough to speak up – whether about their sensory needs, communication preferences, or work routines – managers have a crucial role in listening, supporting, and helping them figure out next steps. This doesn't need to be complicated. Sometimes, it's as simple as giving someone space at lunch, adjusting the lighting, or rethinking how a task is assigned.

The goal is to understand what helps individuals do their best work. As Amanda writes, “a person might not be disabled by who they are, but by the environment they're placed in”.



WHAT IS NEURODIVERSE COMMUNICATION?

BENEFITS OF INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATION

COMMUNICATION STYLES

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

TOOLS AND TEMPLATES

CASE STUDY: ROSEANNE THOMAS, AHDB

When AHDB revisited its communications strategy earlier this year, the goal was to communicate with members in a more meaningful and accessible way. That meant stripping out jargon, using clear and purposeful language, and recognising that not everyone engages with information in the same way.

“None of this is revolutionary, it’s just small, consistent steps towards making sure our levy payers get information about what they need, when and how they want it,” says Roseanne Thomas, AHDB’s director of communications.

To support the strategy, AHDB commissioned a large-scale survey of over 850 levy payers to understand not just what channels farmers use, but how and when they prefer to receive information.

Nearly three-quarters said they’re most likely to engage with communications after 6pm. Flexibility is crucial, as 77% of respondents describe their schedules as unpredictable. Relevance was deemed vital, with respondents seeking shorter, sector-specific updates. However, there was also strong interest in broader, cross-sector topics such as sustainability and carbon.



Digital preferences

Email and direct mail scored high in terms of trust and usefulness, particularly for regular updates such as Grain Market Daily and All Things Dairy. Print remains valued – over half disagreed that post is outdated. Podcasts, videos and face-to-face events also play a key role, offering multiple ways to engage depending on individual preferences.

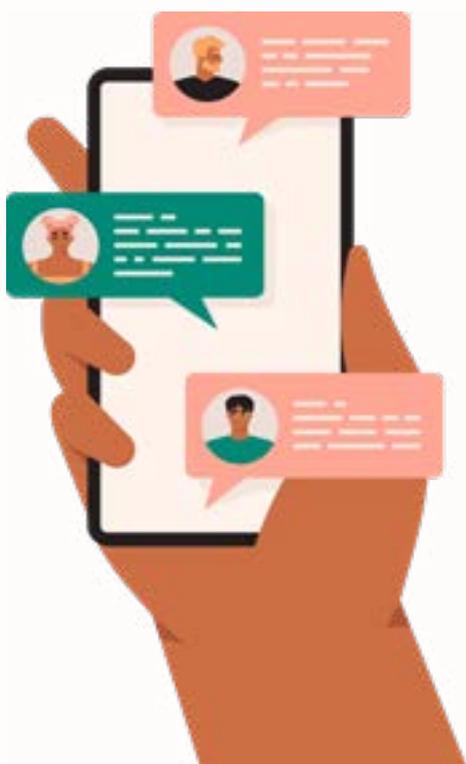
While neurodiversity wasn’t a focus in the survey itself, AHDB is now consciously applying its principles across the board. This means using plain English, avoiding acronyms, and working across multiple channels – from digital to print to in-person events. AHDB’s central comms team supports technical colleagues by editing and simplifying content, and current work on tone of voice is helping refine messaging further.

Importantly, AHDB is avoiding guesswork. “We’re an evidence-led organisation and we wanted to cut through the subjectivity and understand what works for our audience.”

Better communication

So what does effective, inclusive communication look like in practice? It begins with crafting concise and focused messages, using plain English to break down complex topics. It respects farmers’ time by delivering communications at moments that suit them, typically outside of busy working hours, and offers choice through various channels, including podcasts, video, email, post and live events. It also remains relevant by striking a balance between sector-specific needs and broader industry issues.

The strategy is about more than good practice; it’s about cultural change. By listening to honest feedback, adapting how and when they communicate, and applying neurodiversity-aware principles, it’s possible to make communications more engaging, accessible and valuable, regardless of the nature of your business.



WHAT IS NEURODIVERSE COMMUNICATION?

BENEFITS OF INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATION

COMMUNICATION STYLES

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

TOOLS AND TEMPLATES

Understanding different communication styles



Understanding the differences between neurotypical and neurodivergent communication styles can help prevent misunderstandings and enable everyone to feel more valued and heard.

Here are some common differences, as outlined by Anima Nair, head of neurodiversity initiatives at Interweave Consulting.

Directness and literal interpretation

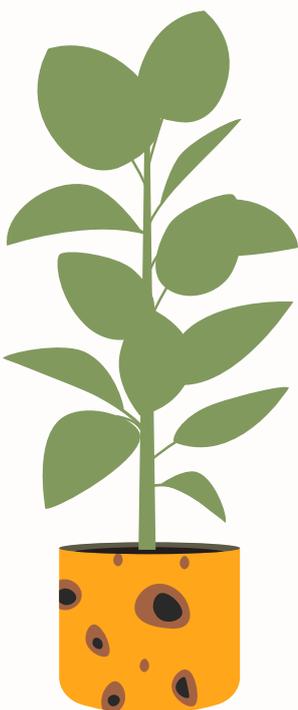
- **Neurotypicals** often use indirect language – softening requests or using hints. For example, they might say, “would you mind checking the fence?” instead of, “please check the fence”.
- **Neurodivergents** typically prefer direct, literal communication. They may not pick up on implied meanings. If you say, “maybe later”, they might take it literally, not realising you meant “no”.

TIP: Say what you mean, kindly and clearly

Processing and responding

- **Neurotypicals** often respond quickly and intuitively to conversation.
- **Neurodivergents** may take more time to process and respond or may speak quickly and jump between topics due to fast-moving thoughts. It’s not rudeness; it’s just a different rhythm.

TIP: Allow time to respond and don’t take interruptions personally



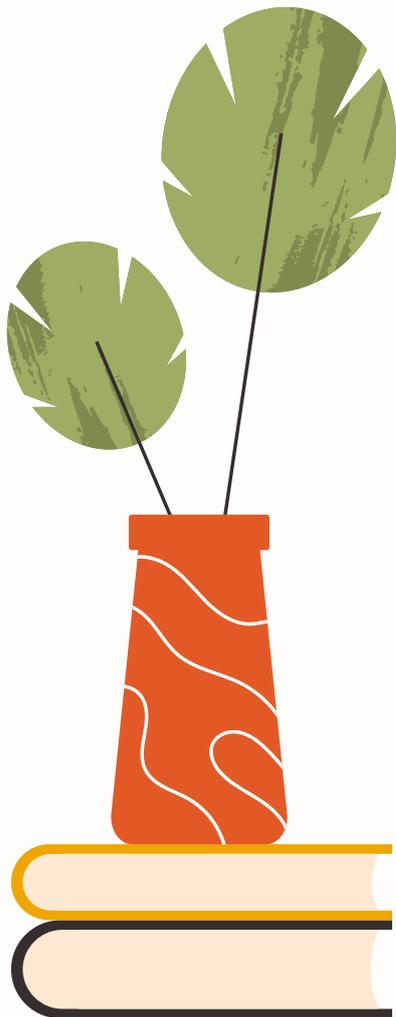
WHAT IS NEURODIVERSE COMMUNICATION?

BENEFITS OF INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATION

COMMUNICATION STYLES

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

TOOLS AND TEMPLATES



Topic of conversation

- **Neurotypicals** often enjoy engaging in light conversation or small talk, such as discussing the weather, sports, or local news.
- **Neurodivergents** may skip small talk and dive deep into topics they're passionate about. They might speak at length – sometimes referred to as “info-dumping” – not to dominate the conversation, but because they're enthusiastic.

TIP: Let them share and gently steer the chat if needed

Preferred communication methods

- **Neurotypicals** may feel comfortable with phone calls, face-to-face chats, or texts.
- **Neurodivergents** might prefer written formats such as texts, emails, or notes, especially in busy or overwhelming environments.

TIP: Ask what communication method works best for them and try to meet their needs

NEURODIVERGENT V NEUROTYPICAL

Communication trait	Neurotypical	Neurodivergent
Use of subtext/sarcasm	Common	Prefers direct, literal
Eye contact	Expected	May avoid or find distressing
Conversation style	Small talk	Prefers in-depth discussion
Processing time	Fast responses	May need pauses
Preferred medium	Face-to-face or phone	Often prefers written

Source: Adapted from “Bridging the Communication Gap” by Anima Nair (2024)

Simple tips for more transparent communication

Working with a diverse team means we sometimes need to adjust our communication style so that everyone stays on the same page. A few small changes in how we give instructions, listen and follow up can make a big difference, helping the job get done right and keeping the team running smoothly.

Be clear and straightforward

Be precise so there is no need to guess at the meaning of vague directions.

- **Say:** “Please move the feed sacks into the red shed.”
- **Avoid:** “Sort things out over there when you have a moment.”

TIP: The more obvious the request, the less chance of confusion or mistakes

Give people time to respond

Not everyone replies quickly, and that's OK. A pause doesn't mean someone's ignoring you – they might just be thinking things through.

TIP: Give them a moment before repeating or rewording your point

Write it down when you can

Follow up spoken instructions with a checklist, whiteboard note or quick text message. This helps team members who process information better visually, especially those with ADHD or dyslexia.

TIP: Use taskboards, job lists or written schedules whenever possible



WHAT IS NEURODIVERSE COMMUNICATION?

BENEFITS OF INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATION

COMMUNICATION STYLES

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

TOOLS AND TEMPLATES

Ask, don't assume

If someone seems unsure, avoid jumping to conclusions such as “they’re not listening”.

- **Try asking:** “Would it help if I explained that differently?”

TIP: Keeping the conversation open shows respect and helps avoid frustration

Respect how people prefer to communicate

Some team members may find phone calls overwhelming and prefer a quick text message. Others may communicate better in one-on-one chats than in group meetings. One [FW survey](#) respondent outlined their preference to wear earphones.

“I often put earphones in when in an open office – to help manage the distraction of keyboard tapping, for example. This is something I find particularly challenging in an office environment as I’m hypersensitive to some noises and pitch. This cuts out background conversations which I find a distraction. I am polite but keep conversations to a minimum. This avoids unnecessary interactions.”

TIP: Ask what works best for them and adjust accordingly – it will help build trust, show respect, and strengthen working relationships

Focus on what’s said, not how it’s said

If someone avoids eye contact or speaks with little expression, it doesn’t mean they’re not interested or sincere – that might just be their natural communication style.

TIP: Listen for the meaning, not just the tone or body language



WHAT IS NEURODIVERSE COMMUNICATION?

BENEFITS OF INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATION

COMMUNICATION STYLES

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

TOOLS AND TEMPLATES

CASE STUDY: LOUISE MAIN, HERDSPERSON

Growing up on a tenanted farm in Dumfries and Galloway, Louise Main always felt deeply connected to animals and the land. But it wasn't until she was older that she began to understand how her brain worked, and how that shaped her place in the world.



Now a Lantra industry champion, she knows first-hand the challenges for neurodivergent

farmers as well as the strengths they bring to the industry. "I was diagnosed with autism a while back, and they think I have ADHD too," says Louise. "But in Scotland, the NHS stopped adult ADHD assessments; I basically got handed a leaflet and told to get on with it."

Louise, who manages a herd of Ayrshires, admits her journey of acceptance as a neurodivergent individual has taken time. "If you met me, I don't think you'd immediately think, 'she's autistic'. I hope I just come across as a bit quirky, but it's taken a long time to learn to love that about myself."

What helps and what doesn't

For Louise, WhatsApp or text messages with simple, clear wording work best. "I love a chat, I really do. But verbal instructions? Nine times out of 10, they go in one ear and out the other. I really need written instructions that I can go back to."

She doesn't use email much as she can find tone tricky. "A message without any emojis can come across as blunt or cold, even if that's not how it was meant. In-person or video chats help me because I can read facial expressions and body language better."

Constructive feedback is another area where thoughtfulness matters. "I have something called rejection sensitivity dysphoria, which a lot of neurodivergent people experience. You might think you're just giving me helpful advice, but I hear, 'you're useless'. That's not your fault; it's how my brain reacts." The best approach? Kind, structured feedback backed up in writing.

Structure, not surprises

As farming often involves fast-paced changes, too many surprises can be overwhelming. "I worked for someone who did regular check-ins – what's going well, what could be better, what's coming up. That helped so much. I like to know what to expect."

Overstimulation is another challenge, especially in noisy environments. "If someone tries to speak to me while I'm milking, I probably won't process what they've said. It's just too much noise. On my own I'm fine, but if there are unpredictable sounds, I'll use noise-cancelling headphones – obviously not while milking, as I need to hear my animals."

Louise is now more open about her diagnosis, but it wasn't always that way. "I used to worry people would think I couldn't cope or I wasn't capable. But I've flipped my thinking and know I'm good at certain things because I'm neurodivergent. I'm brilliant with animals. I read them so much better than I read people, and that's a real asset on farm."

Being part of a small, understanding team helps, and her current employer doesn't spring things on her or expect instant responses. And she has stopped masking, or pretending to be more "neurotypical" just to fit in.



WHAT IS NEURODIVERSE COMMUNICATION?

BENEFITS OF INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATION

COMMUNICATION STYLES

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

TOOLS AND TEMPLATES

Effective communication in practice

No two days on the farm are the same, and neither are the people who work there. In a busy, often high-pressure environment, communication is what keeps everything moving.

When we understand how different team members think and communicate, we can adapt in ways that support clarity, respect and teamwork without slowing things down.

There are some simple but powerful strategies to help you make communication on the farm work better for everyone.

1. Choose the right way to get your message across

In the rush of the day, it's easy to shout instructions across the yard or send a quick text and assume the message has landed. However, different situations and people require different approaches.

For example, WhatsApp or a quick text message might work great for confirming delivery times, but not for explaining a multi-step task. A written checklist can be a lifesaver for routine jobs, but someone might benefit more from a quiet one-on-one chat when getting feedback or instructions.

Here's a snapshot of how different methods can play out on the farm.

Method	Pros	Watch out for...	Best used for...
WhatsApp/texts	Quick, leave a written record	Tone can be misread	Confirming delivery times or simple reminders
Verbal (on the spot)	Immediate and personal	Can be forgotten or misunderstood	Quick jobs or time-sensitive updates
One-to-one chats	Private, tailored, supportive	Time-consuming, may feel intense	Feedback, support or addressing issues
Group briefings	Efficient for everyone at once	Overwhelming for some	Daily plans or safety updates (plus written notes)
Written checklists	Clear, can be referenced anytime	Not everyone prefers reading	Routine jobs, health and safety steps

2. Think about timing and setting

Where and when you speak can make a big difference, especially for serious conversations. Trying to give feedback next to a running tractor or in the middle of a busy barn isn't ideal for anyone. Instead:

- Avoid noisy or high-pressure environments for meaningful conversations
- Aim for earlier in the day when people are more focused and less tired or anxious
- Try a "walking meeting" – it can ease tension and make the conversation feel more natural.

3. Give clear, constructive feedback

Everyone needs feedback to grow, but for neurodivergent team members, clarity, structure and a bit of preparation might go a long way towards ensuring effective feedback.



WHAT IS NEURODIVERSE COMMUNICATION?

BENEFITS OF INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATION

COMMUNICATION STYLES

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

TOOLS AND TEMPLATES



- Give notice before feedback sessions to reduce anxiety
- Explain the format “We’ll cover what’s going well, any issues, and next steps”
- Follow up in writing so they can reflect at their own pace
- Allow time to process – don’t expect instant reactions.

Example: Need to address cow hygiene standards? Let the team member know the day before, then share a simple visual checklist alongside your verbal feedback.

4. Handle conflict with care

Disagreements are part of any workplace, but how you handle them sets the tone for your team. For some neurodivergent individuals, conflict can feel especially overwhelming. When addressing tension:

- Choose a quiet, neutral setting
- Give advance notice when possible – avoid surprise confrontations
- Stay calm and stick to facts, not assumptions
- Be open to their perspective and avoid language which is likened to “overreacting” or “dramatic” – what’s minor to you might be significant to them
- A little empathy can go a long way in resolving issues without lasting friction.

5. Make social spaces inclusive

Farms often have tight-knit teams, but without thought social dynamics can become unintentionally exclusive. Inclusion doesn’t stop at the end of the workday.

- Don’t pressure people to join in – respect those who prefer quiet time
- Avoid inside jokes or banter that might alienate someone
- Clearly share when, where, what to bring, and what to expect at social events
- Consider low-pressure get-togethers, like a morning tea break or a structured barbecue with a start and end time. For example, send out a short message that says...



Barbecue at the main barn
When: Saturday at 4pm
Dress code: Jeans/shorts, T-shirts and comfortable footwear
What to bring: Food provided – just bring yourself!
When will food be served? 6pm
What will be served? Burgers, sausages, salads
Who will be there? All of the farm team
Will there be music playing? Yes, at a comfortable level



WHAT IS NEURODIVERSE COMMUNICATION?

BENEFITS OF INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATION

COMMUNICATION STYLES

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

TOOLS AND TEMPLATES

Tools and templates

You don't have to change everything overnight. Creating a communication culture where everyone feels seen and understood makes your farm business stronger and more inclusive. To get started:

- Ask your team how they prefer to receive instructions or feedback
- Review your current communication – is it clear, consistent and inclusive?
- Try one change this week – like using a visual checklist or planning a feedback chat ahead of time.

A simple tool that helps people collaborate more effectively and respectfully from day one is the Biodex. Think of it as a quick-start guide that is useful for any team member regardless of their neurotype.



Farm team Biodex template

You can use this as a shared Google Doc, in paper format or as part of your onboarding process.

Name / preferred name:

Preferred pronouns:

Contact and communication

- **Best way(s) to contact me during work hours:** for example, WhatsApp, verbal, written note, phone call
- **When I'm usually most focused or available:** for example, early mornings, after lunch
- **Typical response time:** for example, I'll reply by end of day / prefer same-day replies
- **If I don't reply, the best next step is:** for example, send a follow-up or talk to me directly

Work style and preferences

- **Tasks I enjoy and do well:** for example, routine work, machinery, animal care, spreadsheets
- **Things that help me focus:** for example, quiet spaces, music, headphones, written lists
- **Work conditions that challenge me:** for example, loud environments, vague instructions
- **How I prefer to learn new tasks:** for

example, understand why it is needed, watch someone first, written steps, hands-on, ask questions

Feedback and support

- **Do I like public praise?** yes / no
- **Best time to receive feedback:** for example, at the end of the day, in the moment
- **Best way to receive feedback:** for example, verbally, written with time to reflect
- **Phrases that help me receive feedback well:** for example, "Can I offer a suggestion?", "Here's something we could try differently next time..."

Triggers/things to avoid

- **Situations that cause stress or anxiety:** for example, being put on the spot, unexpected changes, raised voices
- **Things I appreciate others doing:** for example, giving notice before group meetings, warning before loud tasks

Other notes

- **Comfortable speaking in a group?** yes / no / depends
- **Interesting fact or hobby?**
- **Anything else you'd like the team to know?**



WHAT IS NEURODIVERSE COMMUNICATION?

BENEFITS OF INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATION

COMMUNICATION STYLES

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

TOOLS AND TEMPLATES

CASE STUDY: SAM PARRIS, DAIRY FARMER

Although Sam Parris is open about his dyslexia, the questions below take the pressure off individuals to “disclose” their neurodivergence and put the emphasis back on preferences and communication styles, which in turn normalises these differences. Here is his Biodex.



- **Preferred name:** Sam
- **Pronouns:** He/him
- **Contact:** Phone, text or WhatsApp (more likely to get reception with WhatsApp during the day)
- **Response time:** 15 minutes – if you don’t get a response, try again later!
- **Focus time/best time to contact:** 10.30am – after milking and breakfast
- **Work strengths:** Problem-solving, milking
- **Challenges:** Doing something for the first time
- **Learning style:** Let me watch someone else then work out how to do it myself
- **Feedback:** Best to give me feedback face-to-face, straight away, so I know how to improve next time
- **Things that cause stress/anxiety:** Building up to a deadline like a Farm Assurance inspection. Using to-do lists to keep on track helps

SOURCES AND EXPERT INPUT PROVIDED BY

- Anima Nair, head of neurodiversity initiatives, Interweave Consulting
- Roseanne Thomas, director of communications, AHDB
- ACAS – www.acas.org.uk/neurodiversity
- [Autistic peer-to-peer information transfer is highly effective](#) (PDF research paper) National Autistic Society – www.autism.org.uk
- [Neurodiversity at Work](#) (PDF document)



YOUR COMMENTS WELCOME



REGISTER FOR FUTURE LEVEL THE FIELD GUIDES

GIVE FEEDBACK ON THE CAMPAIGN

