



Coaching Neurodivergent Leaders & Managers

KEY TAKEAWAYS

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The SESSIONS

Coaching neurodivergent leaders starts by recognising what you assume to be true

Make space for their experiences,
not just your expectations.



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Empty Your Cup

Coaching starts with curiosity. Set aside assumptions and create space for the person in front of you.

- Your own beliefs, training, and unconscious biases are part of your “cup.”
- Emptying it means making room for the client’s truth—not yours.
- Bring only a little knowledge to help guide questions, not shape answers.

TIP

Before each session, pause and ask yourself: “What might I be assuming?”



Neurodivergence Is Complex and Individual

Neurodivergence isn't one thing. Each person's experience is unique- coaching should reflect that.

- Definitions of neurodivergence are evolving—there's no fixed list.
- It can include diagnosed conditions like autism or ADHD, or less defined traits.
- People with similar diagnoses can have very different profiles.

TIP

Avoid generalising from past clients. Stay curious about each individual's lived experience.





There's no one-size-fits-all neurodivergent experience.

Coaching must focus on the person -
not the diagnosis.

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Drop the Diagnosis Assumptions

Two people with the same diagnosis can have very different traits, needs, and strengths.

- Don't assume all autistic people are literal or unemotional.
- Neurodivergent people may have traits you don't expect - like hyperempathy.
- Traits are nuanced and often misunderstood through stereotypes.

TIP

Don't treat labels like instructions - ask "what's true for you?" instead.



Coaching Is a Human Conversation

Forget titles. Coaching is simply a conversation between two people - each with their own ways of thinking and being.

- Even coaching from a manager counts—it's still a conversation.
- We all lead ourselves daily; leadership isn't always a formal role.
- Coaching moments can happen informally, not just in structured sessions.

TIP

If it feels helpful, reframe coaching as “having meaningful conversations that support growth.”





Coaching Is Just a Conversation

Forget the fancy framework - it's still two humans talking.



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Be Both Neuroaffirming and Neuroinclusive

Affirmation means saying “you are enough.”

Inclusion means adjusting your practice so people can truly participate.

- Neuroaffirming = seeing and validating someone as they are.
- Neuroinclusive = removing barriers to participation.
- You need both for coaching to be safe, supportive, and effective.

TIP

Ask, “Am I showing this person that they belong and supporting their access?”



Look for Spinach and Kryptonite

Focus on what energises (spinach) and what drains (kryptonite) each client. That's more useful than listing symptoms.

- Spinach = natural strengths or energisers.
- Kryptonite = tasks or settings that cause fatigue, overwhelm, or anxiety.
- Neurodivergent people often have “spiky profiles” with big differences between ease and effort.

TIP

Use simple questions like: “What feels easy for you?” and “What’s the hardest part of your day?”



Ask, Don't Assume

Start every coaching relationship with gentle, open questions: “What helps you feel supported?”

- Adjustments could be as simple as note-taking or timing.
- Many neurodivergent clients won't ask unless invited to.
- Ask again if needed—it may take time for preferences to become clear.

TIP

Ask early: “Is there anything I could adjust to make this more effective for you?”





Saying “you belong” isn’t enough.

Coaching becomes powerful when it also
removes barriers to access.



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Open Questions May Not Work for Everyone

Open-ended questions can be overwhelming. Offering structured choices can help clients respond more easily.

- Broad questions can lead to overload or anxiety.
- Offering options helps focus thought and reduces pressure.
- Always leave space for “another option I didn’t mention.”

TIP

Try using decision-tree style prompts like “Would you prefer A or B?”



Executive Function Challenges Are Real

Planning, starting tasks, memory, and focus may need support. Strategies, not judgment, are key.

- Executive function includes memory, planning, starting tasks, emotional control, and more.
- Support might include visual tools, check-ins, or coaching structure.
- Even small strategies—like a shared document—can reduce stress.

TIP

Be ready to offer ideas—but frame them as optional experiments, not solutions.



Sensory Environments Matter

Lighting, sound, and movement affect people differently. Ask what helps, and be ready to adapt.

- Some clients may need to fidget, move, or avoid eye contact.
- Virtual settings can be adjusted too (e.g., sound suppression, video filters).
- Ask what sensory factors help or hinder focus and comfort.

TIP

Offer flexible options for session settings - camera on/off, walking meetings, or email follow-ups.



Silence Can Be Confusing

If you use reflective pauses, explain them. “I’m pausing so we can both think” helps clients feel safe.

- Unexplained silence can feel like rejection or error.
- Clarifying your use of silence supports psychological safety.
- Always check in if a pause felt awkward or confusing.

TIP

State your intent out loud: “I’ll pause for a moment so we can both reflect.”





Assumptions break trust - curiosity builds it.

Ask what support looks like,
don't assume what someone needs.

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Not Everyone Likes Goals

Some clients thrive with clear goals. Others feel pressure. Be flexible and let them lead the process.

- Some people need loose intentions, not fixed goals.
- Coaching can focus on reflection, not always on action steps.
- Ask what feels motivating versus overwhelming.

TIP

Ask, “Would you like to set a goal today, or just explore the topic and see what comes up?”



Don't Judge Timekeeping

If a client is late or disorganised, it may reflect executive function differences - not a lack of respect.

- Neurodivergent clients may find timekeeping very difficult.
- Their presence shows commitment—even if it doesn't match norms.
- Recognise effort over punctuality.

TIP

Shift your inner narrative from “They’re late” to “They made it - and that matters.”



Affirmation Builds Psychological Safety

Even small signs of judgment - like a raised eyebrow—can damage trust. Neurodivergent clients often notice.

- Past criticism makes many clients extra sensitive to judgment.
- Subtle signals (tone, expression) are often picked up.
- True safety means unconditional acceptance—not just verbal support.

TIP

Stay conscious of your facial expressions and tone - your body language matters.



Self-Awareness Helps Coaches Too

Understanding your own reactions and assumptions is part of being a truly affirming and inclusive coach.

- Your background shapes how you respond to others.
- Bias isn't a flaw - it's something to be noticed and managed.
- Self-checks support better relationships and safer spaces.

TIP

Reflect after sessions: "Did I bring any unhelpful assumptions into that conversation?"





Clear goals can feel motivating - or overwhelming.

Ask what structure works best,
and let clients lead the pace.



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Use Tools Like Facet5 Thoughtfully

Facet5 helps clients and coaches understand strengths and challenges without judgment, supporting tailored coaching.

- Use Facet5 to support—not define—the client.
- Break down reports visually or share summaries.
- Match feedback to the person's preferred style and pace.

TIP

Share only small parts of personality reports at a time to avoid overwhelm - talk through them slowly.





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