



Exploring Work Styles without Centring Diagnosis

Presenter: Nicole Done (Xceptional Academy)

Who are we?



About Us



Xceptional Academy are **neurodiversity experts** who work with leaders in the private, public, and community sectors to create genuinely safe workplaces for neurodivergent people. Our team combines lived experience, academic research, and industry knowledge in co-designing a suite of solutions for employers.

- Workforce Planning
- Neuro-inclusion Training
- Neuro-inclusion Advisory
- Assessment and Coaching

Learn more



Option 1

Jobseeker with Cert. IV in Business Admin. To support job success prefers written instructions, clear task priorities, works best in a quiet, predictable environment and benefits from a structured 1:1 check in at the start of each shift. Part-time.

Option 2

Autistic jobseeker seeking admin work. Part-time. Cert. IV in Business Admin.



Scan me!



Join by Web PollEv.com/nicoledone259



Which gives you more useful information for job matching and employer conversations?

2 surveys completed

In This Session, We'll Cover

1. Understanding individual needs and building trust
2. Reframing from diagnosis into work style preferences
3. Why many neurodivergent individuals may need support to identify their own preferences
4. A work style preference framework
5. Supportive questions in action
6. Translating preferences for employers
7. Open discussion and questions



"When we are curious, we lay the foundation for trust."

Our goal is communicate:

- ✓ **You are safe here**
This is not about judgement, testing or forcing disclosure.
- ✓ **You are the expert in your own experience**
The consultant's role is to support reflection, not make assumptions.
- ✓ **We are going to focus on what works**
The conversation will explore strengths, preferences and practical supports.



You **do not need** to focus on someone's **diagnosis** to support them well.

You need to understand how they **work best.**



Reframing Diagnosis into Work Style Preferences

Instead of Asking

- What condition do you have?
- What challenges do you faced?
- What are your limitations?
- What can't you do?

Ask

- What helps you do your best work
- How do you prefer to learn new tasks?
- What makes communication clearer for you?
- What environments help you focus?
- What gets in the way of your productivity?
- How do you prefer feedback to be given?

How do we gather the information we need?




Work preferences are not always obvious

Many neurodivergent jobseekers may not yet have the understanding of self or language to explain what they need at work.

This may be because they have:

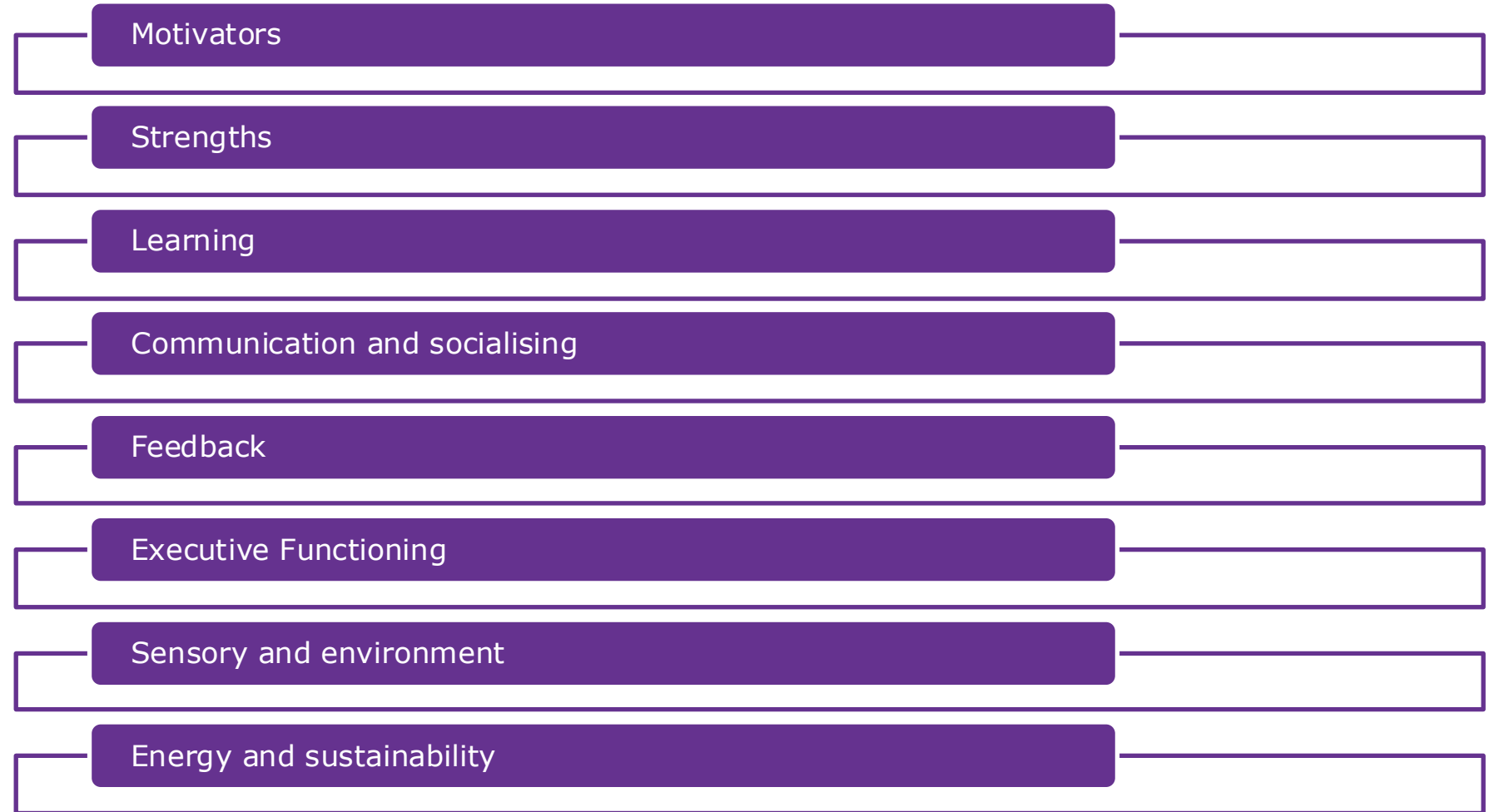


- spent years masking, adapting or trying to work in ways that do not suit them
- felt exhausted, overwhelmed or underperforming without knowing exactly why
- internalised the message that their needs are “too much” or that they should just try harder
- had negative experiences asking for adjustments or support
- never been asked what helps them focus or perform at their best
- received a recent diagnosis and are still making sense of what this means for work
- been diagnosed years ago but told to “push through”, “cope” or hide discomfort



**Ask the Right
Questions**

Work Style Preference Framework



Examples of Questions

Motivators

- What tasks do you enjoy doing?
- What parts of your previous role did you find satisfying?
- Can you think of a time when you felt proud of something you did at work, study, home or in the community?
- What helped you do well?
- What conditions supported that?

Strengths

- What are things other people often come to you for help with?
- What would family, friends, teachers, colleagues or past managers say you are good at?
- What do you find easier than other people seem to?
- What tasks do you usually pick up quickly?
- What activities make you feel capable, interested or confident?
- Are there tasks where you notice details, patterns or problems that others might miss?
- Do you enjoy fixing things, following a process, improving a system, helping others, organising information, solving problems or working with your hands?

Learning

- How do you learn a new task best? Do you prefer written steps, demonstration, video, practice, repetition or time to process?
- Do examples, screenshots, checklists or templates help?
- Is it easier to learn one task at a time?
- What helps you remember information after training?
- How do you prefer to ask questions?
- What makes learning feel rushed, confusing or stressful?
- What support helps you feel confident to do the task independently?

Examples of Questions

Communication

- How do you prefer to receive information: face to face, video, written, phone or a combination?
- Which communication methods feel easiest, and which feel hardest?
- How do you process verbal information? Do you need repetition, written follow up or time to respond?
- What helps instructions feel clear: steps, deadlines, priorities, examples or expected outcomes?
- How do you usually show that you are listening? What might others need to understand about that?
- Do you feel comfortable communicating with people you do not know well?
- How do you feel about initiating conversations or asking questions?
- Do you prefer planned conversations, or are spontaneous conversations okay?
- How do you prefer changes or updates to be communicated?
- What makes communication confusing, stressful or overwhelming?

Socialising at Work

- What does workplace inclusion look like for you?
- Do you prefer one to one, small group or larger group interactions?
- How do you like to spend breaks?
- Are there social situations that feel unclear, tiring or stressful?
- How can colleagues include you without putting you on the spot?
- What helps you feel part of a team?
- How do you feel about social activities at work; teamwork, Work dinner or drinks, attending team building days?

Feedback

- How do you prefer to receive feedback?
- Do you prefer feedback verbally, in writing or both?
- Do examples and clear next steps help?
- Do you need time to process feedback?
- What makes feedback feel useful rather than overwhelming?
- What support helps you apply feedback?

Examples of Questions

Executive Functioning

- How do you keep track of tasks and manage your time?
- What helps you know what to do first?
- Do you prefer clear deadlines, written lists, reminders, visual systems or regular check ins?
- What information helps you start a task confidently?
- How do you manage several tasks at once? Talk with me about your memory skills.
- What happens when priorities change suddenly?
- How do you prefer changes to be communicated?
- What makes it easier to restart after an interruption?
- Explain how your attention works. Do you go into hyperfocus?
- How do you know when a task is finished well?

Sensory and Environment

- Are there sensory experiences that make work harder, such as noise, lighting, smells, temperature, movement or visual clutter?
- What kind of environment helps you focus, stay regulated and complete tasks?
- Is your desk or workstation setup suitable?
- Are you distracted or overwhelmed by noise? Do headphones or quiet spaces help?
- Are there particular lights, sounds, smells or textures that are uncomfortable or distracting?
- What helps you self regulate during the workday?
- Do you use movement, stimming, fidget tools, headphones or short breaks to stay calm or focused?
- What practical adjustments would make the environment easier to work in?
- Would you benefit from working from home a few days per week?

Energy and Sustainability

- Which parts of work take the most energy?
- Which tasks are easier to sustain, and which require recovery afterwards?
- What are the early signs that you are becoming tired, stressed or overloaded?
- What happens if you push through for too long?
- What helps you reset during the day?
- Do breaks, quiet time, movement, headphones or time alone help?
- What work hours, routines or task patterns are most sustainable?
- Do you work best at particular times of day?
- What practical supports would help you maintain energy and avoid burnout?

Supportive Questions in Action




A close-up photograph of a person wearing blue overalls and work gloves, using a long-handled tool to work on an engine. The background is a blurred workshop environment.

“Can you work under pressure?”



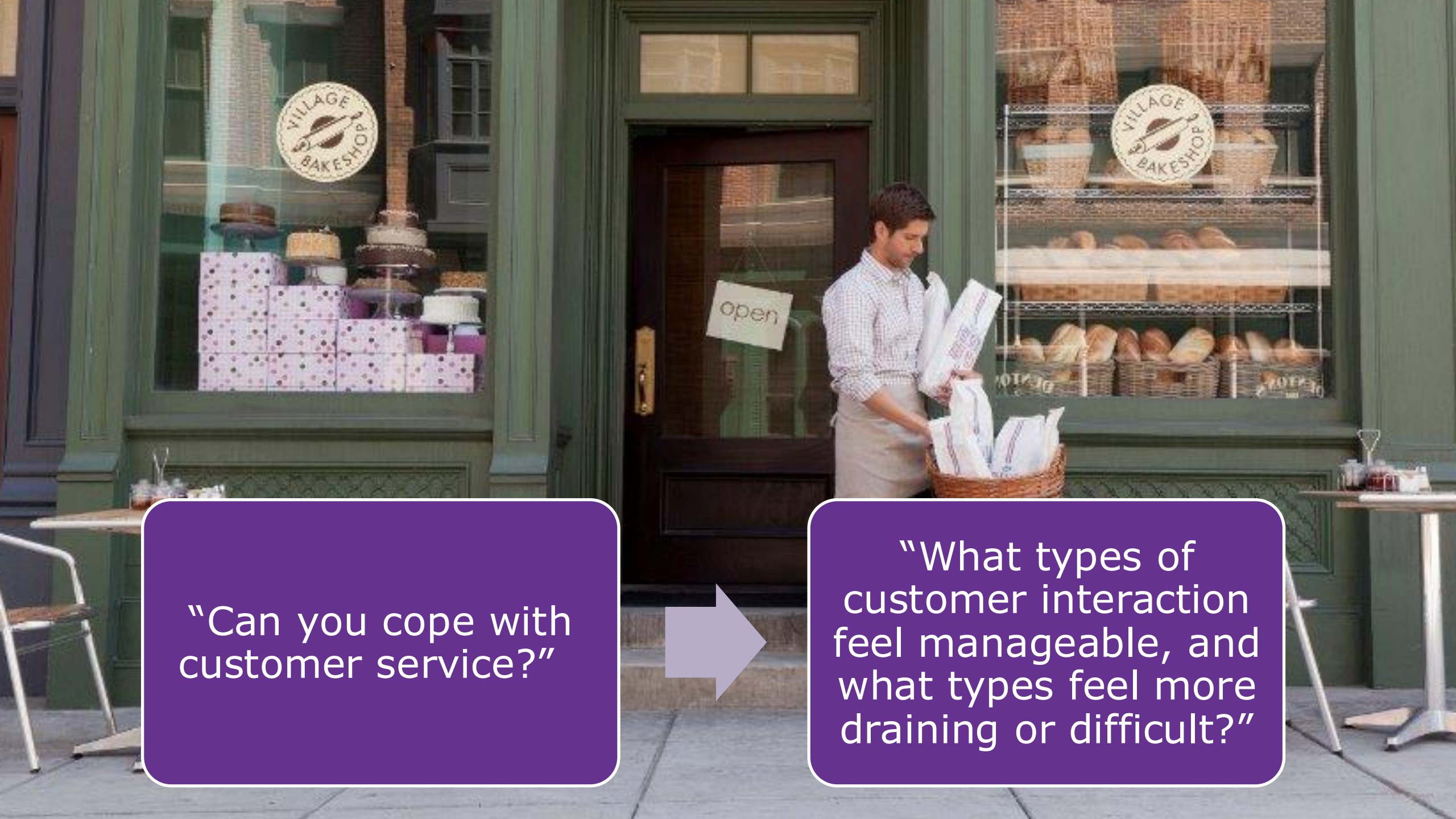
“What type of deadlines (or busy environments) do you manage well, and what types make it harder to think clearly or perform at your best?”



“Will you be reliable with different start times?”



“What routines, reminders or supports help you arrive on time, manage shifts and keep track of work expectations?”



“Can you cope with customer service?”



“What types of customer interaction feel manageable, and what types feel more draining or difficult?”

When we move away from diagnosis as the centre of the conversation, we make space for the person.

That is where

- better job matching
- better support
- more sustainable employment outcomes begin.

Translating Preferences for Employers

Turning work style preferences into employer ready information

Once you understand a person's work style preferences, the next step is to translate them into practical, job relevant information.

The aim is to help the employer understand:

Our goal is communicate:

- ✓ what helps the person perform well
- ✓ how they learn and communicate best
- ✓ what supports clarity, focus and confidence
- ✓ what environmental factors may impact productivity
- ✓ what adjustments may help the person meet the expectations of the role
- ✓ how the workplace can set the person up for success from day one



Work style information	Employer ready language
"I need time to process verbal information."	"Written follow up after verbal instructions will support accuracy and confidence."
"I get distracted by noise."	"A quieter workspace or use of headphones may support focus for detailed tasks."
"I find sudden changes hard."	"Advance notice of changes, where possible, will support smoother transitions."
"I do not always know what to do first."	"Clear priorities, deadlines and check ins will help the person stay on track."
"Feedback can feel overwhelming."	"Feedback is most useful when it is specific, private and includes clear next steps."
"I do better when I know what to expect."	"A clear induction plan and predictable routines will support confidence and early success."



Q & A

Thank you

Let's stay in touch!



Nicole Done

Principal, Neurodiversity Enablement

 +61 405129483

 nicole@xceptionalacademy.org.au



Looking for resources?



Free Downloads

<http://xceptionalacademy.org.au>