

HAWORTH

# Neurodiversity Design Guide



Create an environment  
where all minds thrive.

HAWORTH

## Designing for Every Mind

Human brains function in a variety of ways—a concept known as neurodiversity. Designing for neurodiversity cultivates environments where everyone can thrive. Throughout this guide, you'll find insights, applications, and solutions to design workplaces that embrace neurodiversity, enhancing engagement, well-being, and performance.



# Contents

## Neurodiversity Insights

08	Trends
10	Designing for Neurodiversity
14	Research & Knowledge
14	Brain Differences
18	The Eight Senses
22	Inclusive Design
24	Workplace Sensory Opportunities
28	Workplace Aids

## Neurodiversity Applications

32	Floorplate
38	Lobby
40	Café
42	Community
44	Workstations
48	Touchdown
50	Retreat
52	Meeting Spaces
58	Lounge

## Neurodiversity Solutions

62	Product Categories
----	--------------------



Neurodiversity

**Insights**



# Spaces That Think Differently

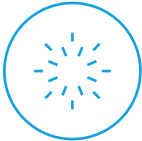
## Nine Trends in Neurodiversity Design

Forward-thinking organizations create workplaces where everyone can thrive. This includes both neurotypical and neurodivergent employees who may think, interact, and experience environments differently. Through our research, Haworth has defined nine trends that encompass important considerations in designing inclusive spaces and cultures.



### Growing Neurodivergent Workforce

Reported neurodivergence in the global workforce has increased 15–20 percent. More than half of Gen Z identify as neurodivergent. By 2030, this generation will comprise 30 percent of the workforce, prompting organizations to develop more comprehensive support strategies and inclusive design solutions.



### Sensory Sensitivities

Environmental factors have a significant impact on the workplace experiences of neurodivergent employees. Sensory sensitivities commonly co-occur, with 65 percent of neurodivergent individuals experiencing sensitivity to both sound and light. Thoughtful consideration of temperature and tactile elements can dramatically improve comfort and productivity.



### Workplace Stress Management

A full 89 percent of neurodivergent individuals report that their workplace environments directly contribute to their stress levels. Organizations that have implemented dedicated quiet spaces and structured support systems have seen a notable reduction in reported stress levels.



### Mental Health Integration

Organizations are prioritizing design solutions proven to help alleviate stress and cognitive overload, organizations are prioritizing design solutions proven to support focus, comfort, and inclusion. 85 percent of neurodivergent employees report that workplace stress affects their performance.



### Neurodiversity & Strategic Design

Traditionally, companies have been reactive in adjusting environments and providing accommodations only after a need is disclosed. Now, organizations are proactively embedding neurodiversity considerations into the foundation of their design strategies. This creates adaptable workspaces that benefit all employees through inclusive design principles.



### Culture and Policy Impact

Organizations that implement neuroinclusive policies and provide an inclusive culture can measurably improve employee retention, team innovation, and overall workplace satisfaction. Data shows that up to 30 percent higher retention rates can be achieved among neurodivergent employees.



### Talent-First Approach

Work environments at leading companies are no longer being retrofitted to meet individual needs on a case-by-case basis. Organizations are instead building inclusive strategies from the ground up to support diverse ways of thinking. This enables them to better harness neurodivergent workers' talents in innovation, problem-solving, and analytical thinking.



### Personalization Through Technology

Smart workplace solutions that allow for individual control over environmental settings are increasingly linked to improved satisfaction and performance among neurodivergent employees.



### Hybrid Work Evolution

Approximately 75 percent of organizations have adopted hybrid work models. Additionally, the average hybrid schedule consists of three days working in-office and two days working remotely.

# Why Designing for Neurodiversity Matters

## Fostering a Culture of Belonging

A diverse workforce offers numerous significant advantages to any organization. Studies consistently demonstrate the positive impact of supporting diverse employees.

Neurodiversity is a valuable asset to organizations, fostering new perspectives, creative problem-solving, and enhanced innovation. Designing for neurodiversity strengthens individuals, as well as entire teams and communities.

**Did You Know?** Organizations that prioritize their employees' needs are generally more successful in attracting and retaining top talent. Creating an inclusive work environment is a crucial step in achieving this goal.

### Key Findings:

**50%** Increase  
in employee retention is reported when staff feel appreciated and supported.

**70%** Surge  
in new market capture is documented for companies with diverse teams.

**35%** Higher Performance  
is observed in diverse teams, with a 70% greater chance of entering new markets.





# The Power of Different Minds

## Tapping into Overlooked Talent

Neurodivergent individuals have unique strengths that can significantly enhance productivity, quality, innovation, and engagement. Yet, despite their potential, this group remains one of the most underrepresented in the workforce.



Use the term “neurodivergent” when referring to individuals. (Example: Jess identifies as neurodivergent.)

### Missed Opportunities

While neurodivergent individuals offer immense value, they are often overlooked. Many are well-educated and highly skilled. However, employers often don't understand how to support neurodivergent individuals at work, leaving behind the untapped potential of this group. Organizations that embrace neurodiversity not only foster inclusion but also gain a competitive edge.



**15-20%**  
of the global population exhibits some form of neurodivergence.



**30-40%**  
of neurodivergent adults are unemployed or underemployed.



**85%**  
of college educated autistic adults are unemployed or underemployed.

# Research & Knowledge

## Understanding Brain Differences

At Haworth, we believe spaces designed with inclusivity in mind empower every individual to perform at their best. Creating environments that support neurodiversity begins with a clear understanding of the correct terminology.

Simply put, certain individuals’ brains develop differently, and they have unique strengths and struggles from people whose brains work more typically (neurotypical). While some neurodivergent people do have diagnosed medical conditions, others do not.



Use the term “neurodiverse” when referring to groups.  
(Example: The workforce is neurodiverse.)

### Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity refers to the natural range of differences in individual brain function and behavioral traits. The concept emphasizes normal variations of the human population.

#### Neurodiversity is not:

- ❌ A medical term
- ❌ A specific individual trait
- ❌ Better task management



### Neurodivergence

Neurodivergence refers to differences in how a person’s brain functions, impacting the way they behave, think, and interact with the world. These differences are natural variations.

#### Neurodivergence is not:

- ❌ A medical term
- ❌ A specific diagnosis
- ❌ Something to be cured



**30%** Boost  
in productivity by neurodiverse teams.



# Common Neurotypes

Neurodivergence encompasses a range of neurological differences, including but not limited to:

## Anxiety

A mental health condition characterized by persistent worry, fear, or unease that can affect daily functioning and decision-making.

## Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

A developmental difference that can impact communication, behavior, sensory processing, and social interactions.

## Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

A pattern of inattention, and/or hyperactivity and impulsivity that can affect functioning and development.

## Auditory Processing Disorder

A condition that affects how the brain processes and interprets sound, particularly speech.

## Down Syndrome

A genetic condition causing developmental and intellectual variations, often accompanied by distinct physical characteristics.



## Dyscalculia

A learning difference that impacts a person’s understanding of numbers and mathematical concepts.

## Dysgraphia

A neurological condition affecting fine motor skills and handwriting ability, making written expression challenging.

## Dyslexia

A learning difference that primarily affects reading, spelling, and sometimes speaking or writing.

## Dyspraxia (Developmental Coordination Disorder)

A condition affecting physical coordination, planning of movements, and sometimes speech.

## Epilepsy

A neurological disorder characterized by recurrent seizures and electrical disturbances in the brain.

**Did You Know?** Each neurotype brings distinct strengths and valuable perspectives. By intentionally designing spaces that cater to a diverse range of cognitive and sensory needs, we help create environments where everyone feels supported, respected, and empowered.

## Intellectual Disability

A condition characterized by limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior that appears before age 18.

## Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

A condition characterized by recurring, unwanted thoughts and repetitive behaviors or mental acts.

## Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

A mental health condition affecting memory and emotional regulation, caused by one or more traumatic experiences.

## Tourette Syndrome

A neurological condition characterized by involuntary movements and vocalizations known as tics.



# Sensory Processing

## The Eight Senses

Creating inclusive workspaces requires a profound understanding of how individuals perceive and experience their environment. While each space should be uniquely designed to support its occupants, understanding the eight sensory systems provides valuable insights for creating environments that embrace neurodiversity.



### Olfactory (Smell)

Provides information about different types of smells, including musty, acrid, putrid, flowery, and pungent aromas.

**Sensitivities:** Interpreting as unpleasant a smell that others perceive as neutral or pleasant. This could be the smell of food, chemicals, perfumes, or colognes.



### Tactile (Touch)

Provides information about the environment and object qualities, including pressure, texture, firmness, sharpness, temperature, and pain.

**Sensitivities:** Certain surface materials, trouble differentiating levels of firmness, temperature, air quality, and humidity.



### Auditory (Hearing)

Provides information about environmental sounds, including volume (loud or soft), proximity (near or far), and direction.

**Sensitivities:** Sound levels, certain pitches and tones, people talking or moving, and repetitive noises.



### Gustatory (Taste)

Provides information about different types of tastes, including sweet, sour, bitter, salty, and spicy.

**Sensitivities:** Loss of taste, aversion to or preference for certain food textures.



### Interoceptive (Internal Body Sensations)

Provides information about how we feel and understand what’s happening inside ourselves and how we regulate emotional response.

**Sensitivities:** Experiences that elicit a heightened or lacking emotional response; can affect self awareness, social understanding, problem-solving, focus, and flexible thinking.



### Vestibular (Balance and Movement)

Provides information about our position in space, our movements, and movement around us; helps maintain balance and coordinate movements.

**Sensitivities:** Balance changes can cause distraction, dizziness, nausea, or anxiety, as well as fidgeting and other self soothing behaviors.



### Proprioceptive (Muscles and Joints)

Provides information about the location of a specific body part and its corresponding movement.

**Sensitivities:** Pressure on body parts and perception of discomfort with levels of motion or stillness; can lead to a desire to seek out or avoid movements (e.g., jumping, swinging, or running).



### Visual (Sight)

Provides information about objects and people; helps us navigate spaces and interact with our surroundings.

**Sensitivities:** Light levels, flickering lights, glare, high-contrast patterns, bright or bold colors, and people moving directly into the line of sight or periphery.

# Varied and Complex Sensory Needs

An individual can be hypersensitive to one element and hyposensitive to another. Providing people with appropriate tools, along with control and flexibility, is essential.

**Hyposensitive**  
Abnormally decreased sensitivity to external stimuli and under-reactivity

**Hypersensitive**  
A heightened awareness of and reactivity to external stimuli



# Internal & External Sensory Factors

## Internal Factors

In addition to sensory sensitivities, neurodivergent individuals often cope with several internal factors that impact their workplace experience, including:

**Uncertainty:** Anticipating new or uncertain experiences can be challenging. Examples include finding an unassigned desk every day or meeting new people.

**Social Expectations:** Neurodivergent individuals may feel judged for their behavior. Having trouble communicating is a common example.

**Coping Mechanisms:** Coping with emotions and managing sensory input can involve strategies like masking (concealing behaviors) or stimming (self-soothing behaviors).

## External Factors

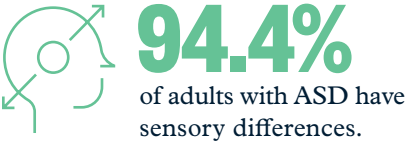
External factors that significantly impact the in-office experience of neurodivergent individuals include:

**Policies:** Inclusive policies can significantly reduce stress for individuals at risk. These policies may include inclusive hiring and onboarding practices, flexibility in work location, and autonomy over work schedules.

**Culture:** A culture that values and celebrates diversity can foster a sense of belonging and acceptance, enhancing the overall work experience.

**Trust:** Providing diversity and inclusion training for managers and employees can foster a supportive environment. This ensures that once a neurodivergent individual is hired, they feel fully supported and trusted to perform their job, while also trusting others to support them.

**Social Relationships:** Having a supportive manager or friend at work can significantly enhance the work experience for neurodivergent individuals.



# Inclusive Design

## Creating Accessible Spaces

Inclusive design is a methodology that considers the full range of human diversity. This approach aims to create spaces and products that allow everyone to participate and feel a sense of belonging. The process includes:

- Identifying a representative user group and analyzing existing exclusions and adaptations is integral to effective inclusive design.
- Fully integrating inclusivity into the design process to broaden the appeal and usability of products and spaces for a wider audience.

### Five Inclusive Design Principles

- 1 Design for people.
- 2 Acknowledge diversity and difference.
- 3 Offer choice when a single design solution cannot accommodate all users.
- 4 Provide flexibility in use.
- 5 Create spaces and products that are both convenient and enjoyable for all.

**Did You Know?** High-concentration tasks make neurodivergent employees more sensitive to environmental stimuli, particularly in terms of lighting conditions and sound.

### Defining Inclusive Design, Universal Design, & Accessibility

**Inclusive Design**

Looks at the diversity of experience that may exclude a person from using a product or space effectively.

**Universal Design**

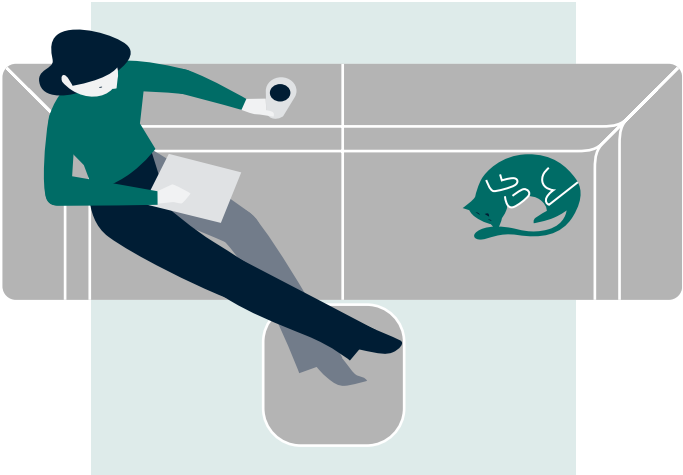
Aims to create one experience that can be accessed and used to the greatest extent possible by all people.

**Accessibility**

Focused on ensuring that the environment can be used by people with disabilities.

### Similarities Among Inclusive Design, Universal Design, & Accessibility

- Recognize that exclusion happens at the interaction point between people and their environments.
- Observe how people adapt to their environment based on their abilities in a given context and use those insights to inform design.
- Work hand in hand to lower barriers and make products and spaces accessible to all.





# Workplace Opportunities for Sensory Support

## Inclusive Design Considerations

Inclusive design plays a critical role in ensuring that the workplace fosters focus, comfort, and a sense of belonging for all members of a neurodiverse workforce. Asking questions like the following will help you evaluate employee needs and make space design choices through the lens of sensory sensitivity, cognitive load, and flexibility.

- ✓ Have we included neurodivergent individuals in our assessments and planning of the space?
- ✓ How can we manage noise levels, lighting, textures, scents, and visual stimuli to accommodate individuals with varying sensory sensitivities?
- ✓ Are spaces organized with clear navigation, structured layouts, and signage to minimize cognitive overload and ease navigation?
- ✓ Do various work settings, such as quiet zones and collaborative spaces, allow individuals to choose environments that support the activities take part in?
- ✓ Do individuals have the ability to adjust elements of their workspace to their comfort?
- ✓ Are smart technologies and assistive tools available to enable personalization to individual needs?
- ✓ Have we chosen materials and color schemes that avoid overwhelming patterns?
- ✓ Are the colors and materials used appropriate for the level of stimulation that is desired in a particular space?
- ✓ Have we provided a variety of space types designed to support the range of hyper and hypo sensitivities?
- ✓ Do all design choices contribute to a comfortable and inclusive environment for everyone, including individuals who are neurodivergent?

## General Neurodiversity Design Principles



### Sensory Considerations

- Provide control over environment.
- Create spaces with varying levels of sensory stimulation.
- Use materials that reduce noise and glare.



### Visual Comfort

- Minimize visual clutter.
- Use calming color schemes.
- Provide adequate contrast for safety.



### Navigation and Wayfinding

- Implement clear, consistent signage.
- Create intuitive layouts.
- Use multiple cues for navigation.



### Acoustic Comfort

- Include sound-absorbing materials.
- Create zones with different noise levels.
- Provide acoustic privacy where needed.



### Flexibility and Choice

- Offer various types of spaces.
- Provide adjustable furniture and equipment.
- Allow for personal control of the environment.

Designing for Activity Support

When designing for sensory support, consider the specific activity in which people will participate. To assist with this, here are the top sensory considerations by activity:

	<p><b>Group Collaborative Work</b></p> <p>Minimize auditory, visual, and internal distractions in group spaces.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Screens</li><li>• Enclosed rooms</li><li>• User-controlled lighting</li><li>• Preset lighting for activity</li></ul>
	<p><b>Group Restoration / Breaks</b></p> <p>Create relaxing, comfortable spaces for groups.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Varying levels of enclosure</li><li>• Size variety for small and large groups</li><li>• Combine pre-set and user controlled lighting</li><li>• Free from strong odors</li></ul>
	<p><b>Individual Work</b></p> <p>Provide a variety of work settings and user controls for individual preferences.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Varying privacy levels</li><li>• User-controlled temperature</li><li>• Conference and meeting</li><li>• Flexible furniture</li></ul>
	<p><b>Individual Restoration / Breaks</b></p> <p>Provide quiet spaces where people can be comfortable relaxing, away from the work environment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Acoustic control</li><li>• Adjustable lighting</li><li>• Free from strong odors</li></ul>



# Workplace Aids for Neurodiversity

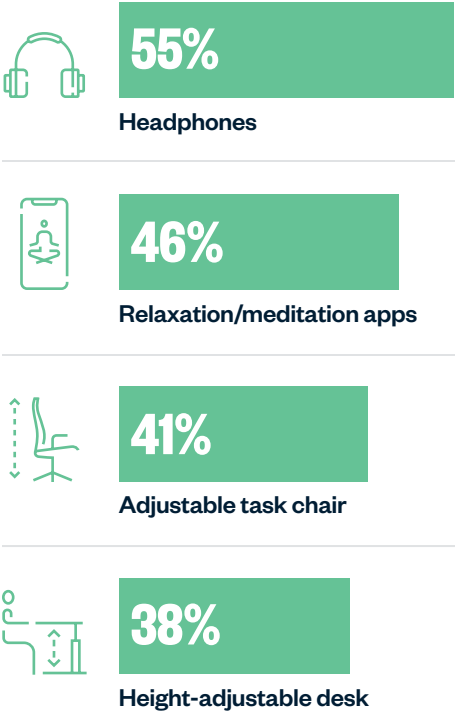
## Usage and Potential Impact

Research presents insights into workplace job aids and tools that support neurodivergent employees, showing current usage satisfaction rates for the top four workplace aids.

**Did You Know?** Building sounds can negatively impact both neurodivergent and neurotypical workers with 52% of neurodivergent and surprisingly even more neurotypical workers (64%) reporting a negative impact.



### Top Workplace Aids for Neurodivergent Employees



“When a flower doesn't bloom, you fix the environment in which it grows, not the flower.”

Alexander Den Heijer



Neurodiversity

**Applications**



# Idea Starters for Planning a Workplace Floorplate

When it comes to the floorplate, the key to inclusive design for neurodiversity is offering choice.

**Implement clear wayfinding systems that use multiple cues, including visual, tactile, and color-coded elements.**

A sense of order and predictability supports the interoceptive sense to help people feel prepared, safe, and comfortable engaging with spaces. Build in signage, architectural differentiators, landmarks, and visual access points.

**Create distinct zones with natural transitions.** Clearly defined spaces are easier for people to understand and use for their specific needs. Consider adjacencies and boundaries that indicate activity levels.

**Use sound masking.** These systems can help drown out distracting sounds from background conversations, equipment use, and other building noises.

**Create easily accessible pathways.** Ensure walkways and aisles are wide and free of sharp corners. This supports the visual, vestibular, and proprioceptive senses.

**Include rooms that support a variety of movements.** This supports the vestibular and proprioceptive senses with space for rocking, spinning, lying down, and dancing.

**Support individual user control.** This includes adding adjustable controls for lighting, sound, temperature, and ventilation where possible.

**Create spaces with appropriate privacy levels.** Consider the activities occurring in each space and the occupants. Provide enclosed touchdowns and meeting rooms to reduce visual and auditory distractions.

**Control strong smells.** Isolate food service areas, supply rooms, and cleaning closets.



Scan to see the complete renderings with Revit symbols.





Sample Floorplate

A variety of spaces form a cohesive floorplate that supports a neurodiverse workforce with choice in a comfortable, easy-to-navigate environment.

- A

The lobby is a welcoming, clearly defined space that offers stimulation or social engagement.
- B

The work café offers a range of activity levels, including social zones designed for groups and quiet corners with soothing views of nature for individuals.
- C

A lounge space serves as a quiet destination that supports focused work for individuals or groups. Established norms help keep the space a refuge.
- D

Meeting spaces offer a variety of settings and levels of enclosure. Consider checking in with team members and asking them what type of space best supports them.
- E

Different types of individual spaces—for work or restoration—are distributed throughout the office so they are accessible to all.
- F

Open-office workspaces feature various levels of visual and acoustic privacy along with individual control.
- G

An outdoor patio supports both work and restoration, giving people access to nature and allowing them to move.



### Questions to Ask:

To begin the inclusive design process and determine your design objectives, use the following questions as a guide:

- What will the space be used for?
- Who will use this space? How often?
- How can the space accommodate diverse sensory needs and preferences?
- How will the space incorporate sensory-friendly elements (lighting, acoustics, textures)?
- Are there specific sensory elements that should be minimized or avoided?
- What type of atmosphere will the space create?

### Determine Objectives/Purpose:

After asking these questions, you may determine that your design objective is one of the following:

- Create a gathering space that accommodates various sensory preferences for meetings, dining, or socializing.
- Cultivate a quiet environment for focused work, with options for sensory-friendly features.
- Design a space for relaxation and rejuvenation, incorporating sensory-friendly elements such as soft lighting and natural sounds.
- Optimize flexibility with zones to support various activities, ensuring spaces can be adapted to meet diverse needs.

### Evaluate the Space for:

In addition, you'll want to evaluate the space for the following opportunities to provide sensory support:

- Orientation around sensory-friendly features (lighting, acoustics, textures) that provide comfort and stimulation.
- Areas where different textures (carpet, hardwood, soft seating) exist or can be easily incorporated, considering sensory preferences.
- Potential to create distinct areas or "rooms" within a larger space, offering options for both open and enclosed environments.
- Options to create defined structures with elements such as partitions for privacy and sensory control.
- Protection from sensory overload (noise, bright lights) to ensure comfort and accessibility for all users.

### Planning for a Variety of Spaces

The goal of an inclusive design approach is to create a range of spaces that are comfortable and conducive to productivity for neurodivergent individuals. To help guide your design, use the color-coded icons to identify the intended use of a space

#### High Impression

Spaces that set the tone and make an impression, impacting how people feel and connect with your culture and brand.

#### Restore & Connect

Quiet havens or community spaces that help people refresh, rejuvenate, and interact to foster well-being.

#### Team Engagement

Formal or informal collaborative spaces for idea generation, strategic activities, and learning, generally away from disruption or noise.

#### Individual Focus

Dedicated areas designed to support concentration, deep work, and privacy. These spaces enable individuals to minimize distractions and maximize their cognitive performance.



Lobby



Café



Community



Workstations



Meeting



Retreat



Lounge



# Lobby

The lobby should be a warm, welcoming, and memorable space that makes a positive first impression on everyone. It sets the tone for your brand and culture, offering comfortable and accessible seating for all visitors.



## Helpful Tips

- Use anchoring elements such as architectural features, lighting, and flooring that help people navigate the space.
- Avoid high-contrast colors and patterns that can create visual confusion.
- Select materials and finishes that create a lasting impression, considering how people feel when entering the space.
- Provide clear directional signage with both text and symbols.
- Include a quiet waiting area away from the main traffic flow.
- Use non-glare lighting and minimize harsh lighting.
- Install adjustable lighting zones with natural light where possible.
- Install sound-absorbing elements to reduce echo and reduce sound transmission between connected areas.
- Offer a variety of seating options (e.g., firm/soft, with/without armrests).





# Café

The work café serves as the heart of the space, encouraging people to gather. This multipurpose social hub gives people access to refreshments and allows them to interact casually and unwind. The space also provides opportunities for informal conversations among cross-functional teams and should accommodate different comfort levels and sensory preferences.



## Helpful Tips

- Consider proximity to other areas, and ensure proper ventilation to manage food odors.
- Support a variety of work, social, and relaxation activities with varied seating, tables, and power connectivity options.
- Create individual destinations with different levels of privacy for retreat, working, or relaxing while maintaining a connection to the lively surroundings.
- Use colors and signage to clearly delineate different zones and assist with wayfinding.
- Provide different levels of enclosure using walls, screens, and varying ceiling heights.
- Provide convenient food and beverage storage and service options, offering diverse tastes and textures for individuals with gustatory sensitivities.
- Use durable and easily cleanable materials to maintain hygiene and appearance.





# Community

This large, open, and flexible space accommodates a variety of activities and group sizes, offering access to technology, refreshments, and comfortable furnishings. Flexible furniture accommodates collaboration, social interaction, solo and group activities.

## Helpful Tips

- Incorporate varied postures, comfort levels, and privacy with varied seating, tables, screens, and booth applications.
- Include active and quiet zones that support work, social, rejuvenation, and retreat activities.
- Use colors, signage, furniture elements, and lighting to define distinct zones and assist with wayfinding.
- Integrate display monitors to support brand messaging, collaboration, communication, and entertainment, as well as maintain visual privacy.
- Install acoustic treatments to manage noise levels.
- Ensure clear sight lines to enhance visibility and awareness.
- Consider durable and easily cleanable materials to maintain hygiene and appearance.
- Provide multiple power, charging, and connectivity options.





# Workstation #1

This variation of an adaptable open workspace addresses individual visual and sensory needs in a shared team environment. The flexible setup enables people to adjust their orientation to minimize distractions from individuals walking directly into the line of sight or periphery.



## Helpful Tips

- Provide workstations that individuals can re-orient throughout the day to accommodate their changing sensory needs.
- Create clear visual cues to distinguish between collaborative and focused work settings.
- Provide height-adjustable tables that support changing postures and movement whenever needed.
- Include ergonomic task chairs with multiple adjustment points for personalized comfort.
- Ensure adequate personal space between workstations to reduce sensory overload.
- Provide height-adjustable desks to promote ergonomic comfort and flexibility.





## Workstation #2

These individual workspaces in an open office encourage collaboration and efficient space utilization. The open layout promotes a sense of community and strengthens team cohesion, while enabling the user to control elements in their workstation to provide privacy.



### Helpful Tips

- Include storage solutions to minimize visual clutter and maintain a tidy workspace.
- Use sound-masking systems to reduce distractions and improve acoustic comfort.
- Ensure adequate space between workstations to ensure personal space and reduce crowding.
- Provide adjustable privacy screens, enabling individuals to tailor their level of visual privacy.
- Incorporate individual task lights with adjustability and dimming, allowing users to customize lighting to suit their needs.
- Use lighting and architectural elements, such as pendant lights and green walls, as wayfinding tools to aid navigation.
- Avoid high-contrast patterns, which can be overstimulating for many users.
- Incorporate biophilic elements, such as greenery and nature-inspired patterns, to provide a comforting connection to the outdoors and subtle visual stimulation.





# Enclosed Touchdown

Small, enclosed touchdown spaces are designed for focused individual work or short-term use. As the spaces are available to anyone who may need them, they should be adaptable. At their core, these spaces should offer user control and features such as height-adjustable desks, ergonomic seating, and adjustable lighting.



## Helpful Tips

- Vary colors and finishes in different touchdowns to accommodate individuals who seek environmental stimulation, as well as those who prefer subdued spaces.
- If room fronts are glass, provide drapery to allow for visual privacy when needed.
- Offer clear occupancy indicators to determine availability.
- Provide good acoustic isolation to prevent noise from filtering in from adjacent spaces.
- Install adjustable lighting controls to customize the environment.
- Include adjustable ventilation options to ensure comfort.
- Use non-reflective surfaces to minimize visual distractions.
- Ensure easy access to Wi-Fi and power outlets for convenient connectivity and charging.





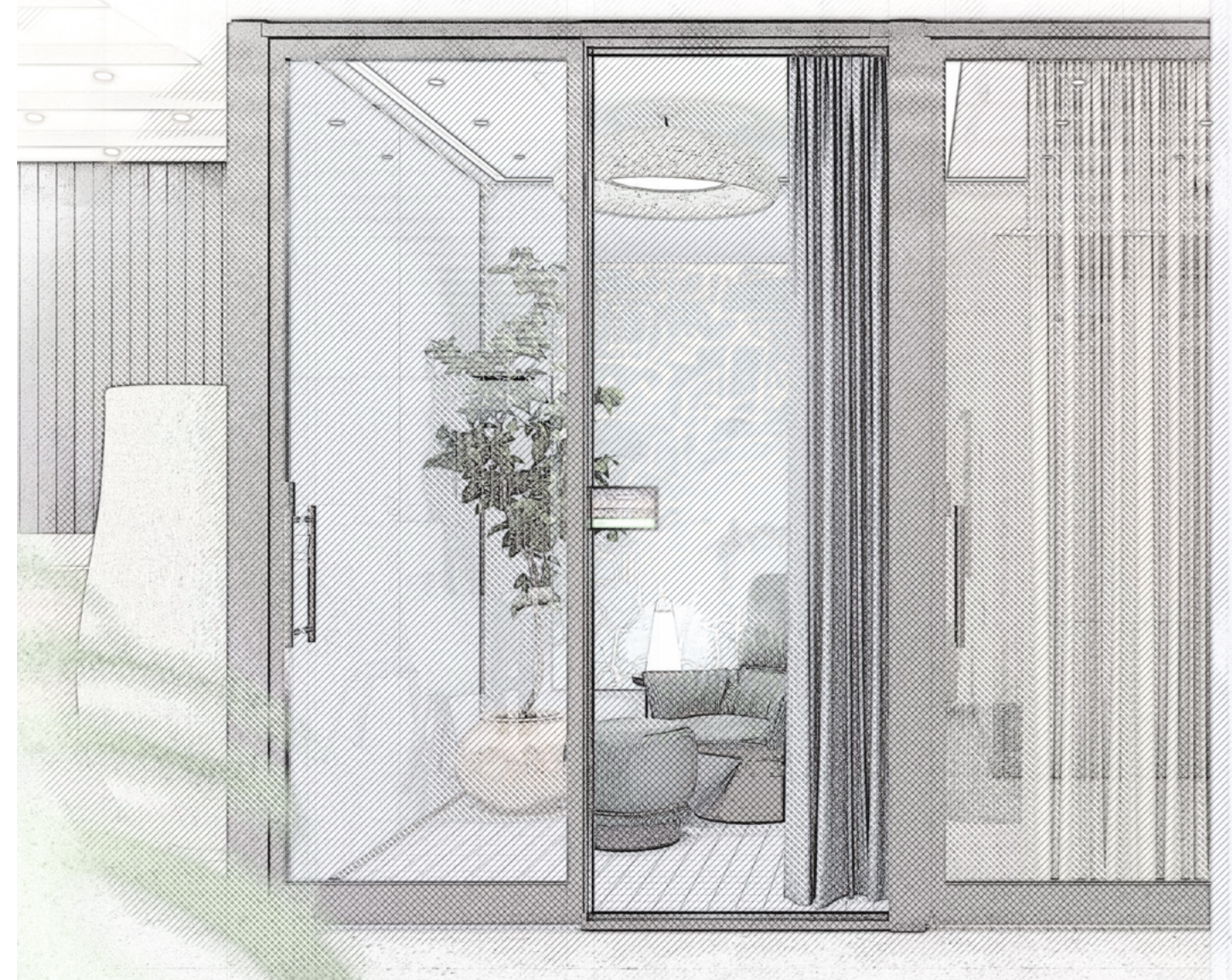
# Retreat

Restoration spaces serve as retreats for employees who need a break from sensory stimulation. These quiet areas feature soothing, layered elements, such as soft seating, neutral colors, and subdued lighting. Include biophilic elements, like plants, nature-inspired visuals, or views to the outdoors to promote relaxation.



## Helpful Tips

- Locate a retreat where it is away from traffic, but still accessible.
- Consider adding draperies to create micro-environments, controlling auditory and visual input.
- Use adjustable temperature controls for personal comfort.
- Consider an area with a window to a serene outdoor view and window treatments that individuals can close if desired.
- Offer a variety of seating textures to suit preferences.
- Add natural elements to enhance calming effects.
- Add sensory-friendly elements such as weighted blankets and fidget tools to support self-regulation.





# Open Meeting Space

Open meeting spaces promote collaboration while offering flexibility and adaptability. The goal is to achieve a balance between openness and privacy, using buffers that enable cognitive work while reducing distractions.



## Helpful Tips

- Ensure lighting levels are adjustable to accommodate different sensory preferences.
- Use curtains or screens to create a semi-enclosed space that can help control stimuli, as well as auditory and visual distractions.
- Provide a large, anchoring table to support group work.
- Use chairs with casters to encourage movement and allow for micro-adjustments.
- Use screens, furniture, and architectural elements as strategically placed buffers to minimize distractions and support cognitive work.
- Use sound-absorptive materials and sound-masking systems to mitigate auditory distractions.
- Dual-height surfaces support movement and choice of posture.





# Enclosed Meeting Space #1

Enclosed meeting spaces provide improved privacy and environmental control, fostering focused collaboration and confidential discussions. They also feature a variety of furniture configurations to accommodate different meeting styles and sensory needs.



## Helpful Tips

- Include tablet chairs with casters to support movement and allow users to adjust their orientation.
- Provide standing-height tables to allow for individual control and movement.
- Provide adjustable lighting to accommodate the group's diverse needs.
- Offer a variety of seating options to cater to different comfort levels and preferences.





## Enclosed Meeting Space #2

Acoustic booths provide quiet, enclosed meeting spaces within open-plan areas. Their compact, modular design allows for flexible placement without requiring permanent construction. The booths are designed to reduce noise, making them ideal for focused conversations, virtual meetings, small group collaboration, or calming restoration.



### Helpful Tips

- Select pod sizes and features that reflect the team's workstyles, privacy needs, and available floor space.
- Position booths to support natural movement and avoid interrupting key circulation paths.
- Ensure access to power and connectivity for a range of digital tools and collaborative needs.
- Include adjustable lighting and ventilation to allow users to personalize their environment for comfort and sensory needs.
- Consider finishes and materials that are both durable and calming, supporting a welcoming and restorative experience.





# Lounge

A dedicated lounge can serve as a destination for deep focus or quiet group work. This space encourages relaxed postures and provides auditory and visual privacy. Soft lighting, rugs, and warm, inviting materials enhance the tactile experience, to create a soothing ambiance that provides comfort for neurodivergent individuals.



## Helpful Tips

- Consider varying applications, comfort levels, and privacy requirements with soft seating solutions, including individual lounge pieces, sofas, sectionals, and banquettes.
- Offer options for standing or moving.
- Create a range of activities, from social interaction to rejuvenation and quiet retreat.
- Use booths, screens, or partitions to divide the space, provide visual privacy, and enhance acoustics.
- Locate the lounge away from main traffic areas, yet conveniently accessible.
- Prioritize material options that are durable, yet soft to the touch and visually calming.
- Incorporate adjustable lighting options to allow individuals to customize their environment.
- Provide clear signage and wayfinding to help individuals navigate the space with confidence.





Neurodiversity

**Solutions**



# Product Categories

Haworth offers a range of solutions to meet your neurodiversity design needs. Our extensive portfolio, along with our family of brands, allows you to provide the flexibility and choice necessary in today’s workplace. We’re here to inspire you with solutions that celebrate individuality, promote well-being, and foster innovative connections.

Height-Adjustable Tables



Tables



Storage



Screens



Booths



Pods



Movable Walls



Architectural Products



Office Chairs



Lounge Chairs



Ottomans and Poufs



Sofas



Rugs



Lighting



# Sources

## Trends

**Growing Neurodivergent Workforce:** Moses, Amanda. “Why Has There Been a Rise in Autism and ADHD Diagnoses?” Psychology Today. Last modified July 14, 2023. Accessed March 27, 2025. <https://www.psychologytoday.com>.

**Sensory Sensitivities:** Weddle, Brooke, Bryan Hancock, and Lucia Rahilly. “What Neurodivergent Employees Need to Succeed.” McKinsey & Company, April 2024.

**Workplace Stress Management:** Weddle, Brooke, Bryan Hancock, and Lucia Rahilly. “What Neurodivergent Employees Need to Succeed.” McKinsey & Company, April 2024.

**Mental Health Integration:** Weddle, Brooke, Bryan Hancock, and Lucia Rahilly. “What Neurodivergent Employees Need to Succeed.” McKinsey & Company, April 2024.

**Neurodiversity & Strategic Design:** Gartner. Hype Cycle for the Future of Work Accessed, 2024. July 18, 2024.

**Culture & Policy Impact:** Gartner. Hype Cycle for the Future of Work Accessed, 2024. July 18, 2024.

**Talent-First Design Approach:** “New ZenBusiness Research Finds Class of 2023 Sees Neurodiversity as an Asset in Leadership & Is Primed to Be the Most Entrepreneurial.” Business Wire. Last modified June 14, 2023. Accessed March 27, 2025.

**Personalization through Technology:** Gartner. Hype Cycle for the Future of Work Accessed, 2024. July 18, 2024.

**Hybrid Work Evolution:** Haworth, Inc. Global Evolving Workplace Study: Hybrid Work Evolution. 2025.

## Why Designing for Neurodiversity Matters

**Fostering a Culture of Belonging:** Glassdoor. “What Job Seekers Really Think About Your Diversity and Inclusion Stats.” 2021. Accessed May 6, 2024. <https://www.glassdoor.com/blog/diversity/>

**Fostering a Culture of Belonging:** Jimenez, Jacinta, PsyD. “Why Psychological Safety at Work Matters and How to Create It.” 2022. Accessed October 24, 2023.

**Fostering a Culture of Belonging:** Copsey, Scarlett. “Using Design to Create an Inclusive Workplace.” Interaction, UK. Accessed November 17, 2023.

**Did You Know?:** McKinsey & Company. Diversity Wins: How Inclusion Matters. 2020. Accessed November 17, 2023.

**Key Findings:** McKinsey & Company. Diversity Wins: How Inclusion Matters. 2020. Accessed November 17, 2023.

## Research & Knowledge: What Is Neurodiversity?

**Understanding Brain Differences:** Cleveland Clinic. “Neurodivergent.” Health Library. Accessed February 13, 2024.

**Understanding Brain Differences:** Oxford University Press. “Neurodiversity.” In Oxford English Dictionary. Accessed May 20, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/8409557016>

**Productivity Boost:** Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Autism Spectrum Disorder Data and Statistics. Atlanta, Georgia: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022.

## Common Neurotypes

**Common Neurotypes:** Cleveland Clinic. “Neurodivergent.” Health Library. Accessed February 13, 2024.

## Sensory Processing

**The Eight Senses:** Neurodivergent Insights. “8 Senses of the Body: The Hidden Sensory Systems.” Accessed July 23, 2025. <https://neurodivergentinsights.com/8-senses>

**ASD Sensory Differences:** Crane, Laura, Lucy Goddard, and Linda Pring. “Sensory Processing in Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders.” Autism, 13 (3) (2009): 215–28. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361309103794>

## Inclusive Design

**Inclusive Design:** Inclusive Design Research Centre. “What Is Inclusive Design.” OCAD University. Accessed February 1, 2024.

**Did You Know?:** Bott, Jennifer, Kristin Reddick, Aaron Haworth, Eric Novotny, and Amilia Wallace. “Supporting Sensory Needs in the Workplace: A Comparison of Neurodivergent and Neurotypical Employee Experiences.” Holland, MI, August 2025.

## Workplace Aids for Neurodiversity

**Top Workplace Aids:** Bott, Jennifer, Kristin Reddick, Aaron Haworth, Eric Novotny, and Amilia Wallace. “Supporting Sensory Needs in the Workplace: A Comparison of Neurodivergent and Neurotypical Employee Experiences.” Holland, MI, August 2025.

**Did You Know?:** Bott, Jennifer, Kristin Reddick, Aaron Haworth, Eric Novotny, and Amilia Wallace. “Supporting Sensory Needs in the Workplace: A Comparison of Neurodivergent and Neurotypical Employee Experiences.” Holland, MI, August 2025.



Love what you see? Let us help you  
create inclusive workplace environments  
that embrace and support neurodiversity  
through our vast portfolio of products.

Visit us at [haworth.com](https://www.haworth.com).

