



# BDA Dyslexia Networks Toolkit

This toolkit has been developed to help those who want to set up a dyslexia, and related conditions, network within their workplace.

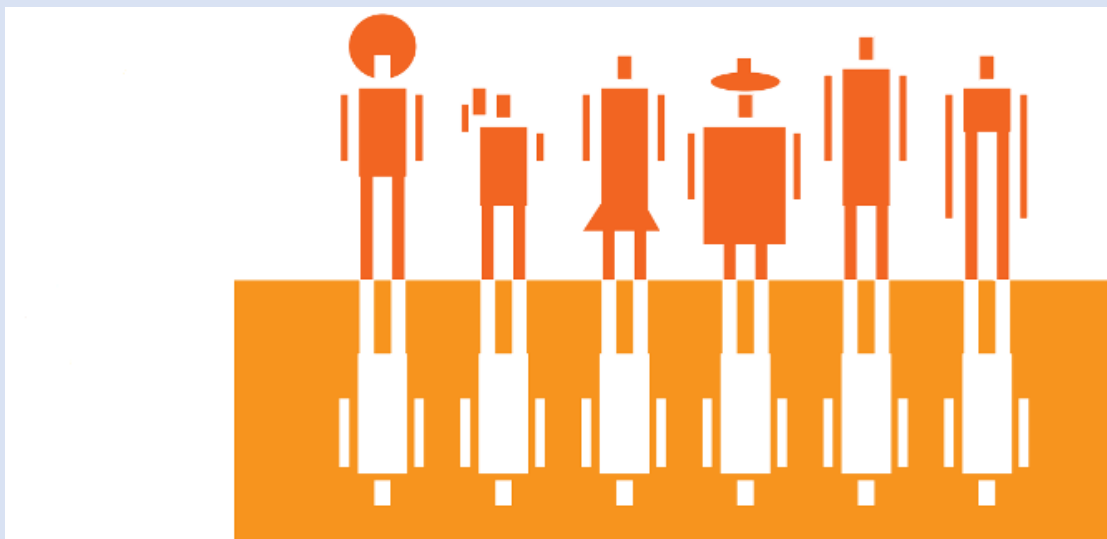
**British Dyslex!a**  
Association

## 1. Your Objectives

The first thing to think about is what are you trying to achieve? There are various ways to create awareness of dyslexia and neuro diverse (ND) conditions and to support dyslexic people in the workplace.

So, the place to start is to clearly define your objectives. This will also make it much easier to describe clearly what you are trying to do to people who might help you or people you need to influence to achieve this.

In thinking about this, please bear in mind that all those with neurodiversity such as dyslexia and related conditions, have a very individual profile.



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They will all have strengths but different ones, and different challenges. They may be affected across a range from hardly at all to really significantly affected. Additionally, if you work in an environment with very highly skilled people, there will still be people there who are considerably affected by their condition, may be operating below their capability and may be using lots of creative coping strategies.

## 2. Types of Networks and Support

The BDA has helped many to set up appropriate support mechanisms for ND employees.

**Networks:** Led by ND people themselves and designed to create better awareness and support for the implementation of reasonable adjustments. These networks seem to fit into three different types:

1. Networks that are principally set up to drive change.



They operate in the organisation but may also engage with the local community. They want to get positive change as quickly as possible and also tend to focus on the implementation of reasonable adjustments, especially assistive technology. These groups can be very focussed and action orientated. Care needs to be taken that the passion of the originator is the only driving force and others need to feel engaged.

2. Networks whose primary purpose is to share.



Members share coping strategies, share experiences and use the space as a safe place to offload. They may also organise peer support. On the plus side, this can be very helpful to those who have recently discovered they are dyslexic or for those who do not want to disclose their dyslexia widely. A potential risk with these networks is that they can become a moaning session and so a clear agenda for each session is important.

3. Networks used to achieve strength in change through greater numbers.



These often work by identifying particular blockers or problems that members face. They can then work with HR staff to remove these issues. These groups are democratic and over time, they can often be seen by both the organisation and employees as the place to go if you are dyslexic.

## Mentoring Schemes:



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The BDA has a pack for employers who want to implement a specific mentoring programme for ND staff. BDA also has a full training programme for mentors and mentees, which includes dyslexia awareness in adults, creating the mentor/protegee relationship, dyslexia friendly communications, coping strategies for dyslexic mentors and protégées, managing the scheme with dyslexics and signposting. This has been found to be very successful and enhanced productivity and engagement by those who have engaged in the scheme. For further information on the training, please contact [onsite@bdadyslexia.org.uk](mailto:onsite@bdadyslexia.org.uk). The pack is available at [http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/common/ckeditor/filemanager/userfiles/Mentoring\\_and\\_Dyslexia\\_MM\\_2017\\_PDF.pdf](http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/common/ckeditor/filemanager/userfiles/Mentoring_and_Dyslexia_MM_2017_PDF.pdf)

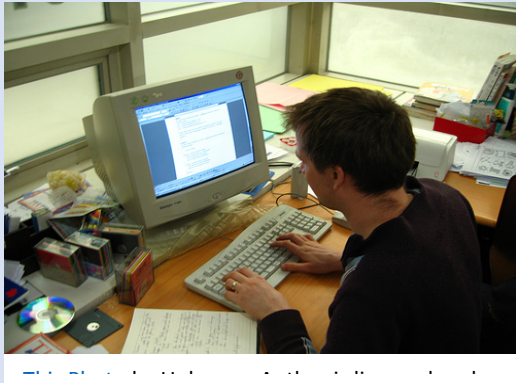
## Dyslexia Champions:



This is a programme, copyrighted by Janette Beetham of Right Resources, which enables those with ND or those with an interest in ND to act as Champions within the workplace. All Champions do the BDA's accredited level 2 training programme on awareness and support. This programme can be studied through elearning, face to face training or a blend of both. It covers awareness of dyslexia and related co occurring conditions and how to support individuals affected, in a range of settings. It is also possible to do the programme independently of the Dyslexia Champions initiative. Further information on this training is available at:

[http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/common/ckeditor/filemanager/userfiles/Services/Training/BDA\\_Training\\_Education\\_Brochure\\_Jul2017.pdf](http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/common/ckeditor/filemanager/userfiles/Services/Training/BDA_Training_Education_Brochure_Jul2017.pdf)

## **In-House Workplace Needs' Assessors:**



Some organisations have decided that it is helpful to undertake workplace needs assessment in house. This is the process whereby employees are assessed for the reasonable adjustments they should have. There is a benefit in doing this in house because the assessor will be aware of the local culture and potentially the job the person is doing. The BDA has an accredited level 4 programme for training workplace needs assessors. Further information is available at:

[http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/common/ckeditor/filemanager/userfiles/Services/Training/BDA\\_Training\\_Education\\_Brochure\\_Jul2017.pdf](http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/common/ckeditor/filemanager/userfiles/Services/Training/BDA_Training_Education_Brochure_Jul2017.pdf)

## **BDA Organisational Members**



The BDA is a membership organisation so there are opportunities to join as an Individual Member, or as a whole organisation. The benefits to the organisation are recognition by potential recruits that this is a safe place to apply to if you are ND. BDA also offers a range of benefits depending on the level of membership for organisations. Please ask for further information from [membership@bdadyslexia.org.uk](mailto:membership@bdadyslexia.org.uk) if you want to know more.

## 4. Getting Helpers



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You will need to engage others to help you if you plan to create a network internally. Once the word is out you are likely to get many requests for help and information. So, we strongly advise that you gather some likeminded people around you before proceeding further.

You could attract others by:

- Downloading some information from the BDA website and adding your name as a contact for anyone else interested in the Charity's work and leaving it somewhere central
- If it is safe to do so, asking for help from your HR department to put you in touch with others who might be ND (don't be surprised if they don't know who is ND though as that is common.)
- Organise one event and then at the end of this, ask for volunteers to help you. See below on meetings for ideas on this.

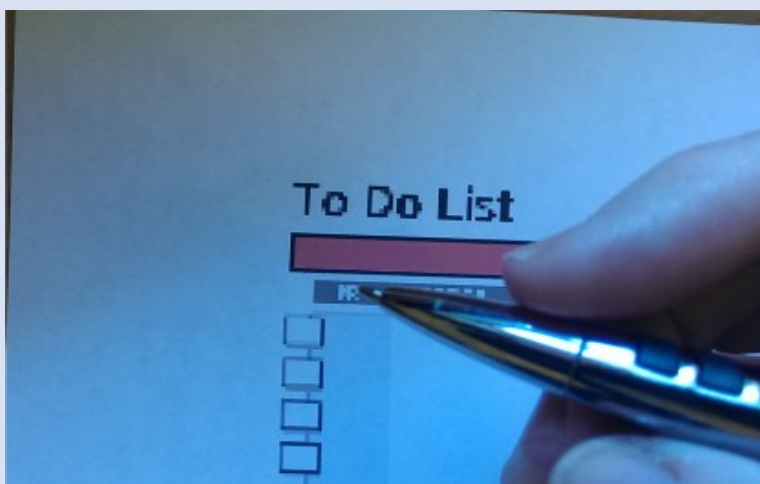
Once you have some helpers, you need to be clear that you cannot do everything as the initiator of the network. Here is a checklist of the things that will need doing, so that you can ask who is prepared to volunteer for items on the list;



## Checklist of Tasks for Volunteers

- Meeting and greeting any guest speakers
- Identifying and befriending new attendees at meetings (to ensure that they feel welcome and able to come again)
- Organising the venue and any refreshments
- Communications and advertising the network and events
- Chairing meetings (this doesn't have to be the network initiator's role if someone else has more experience of chairing meetings for example)
- Responding to queries about the network or general help type queries
- Arranging for any fees to be paid
- Identifying and coordinating speakers at events
- If necessary, clearing up after a meeting

## 5. Preparation



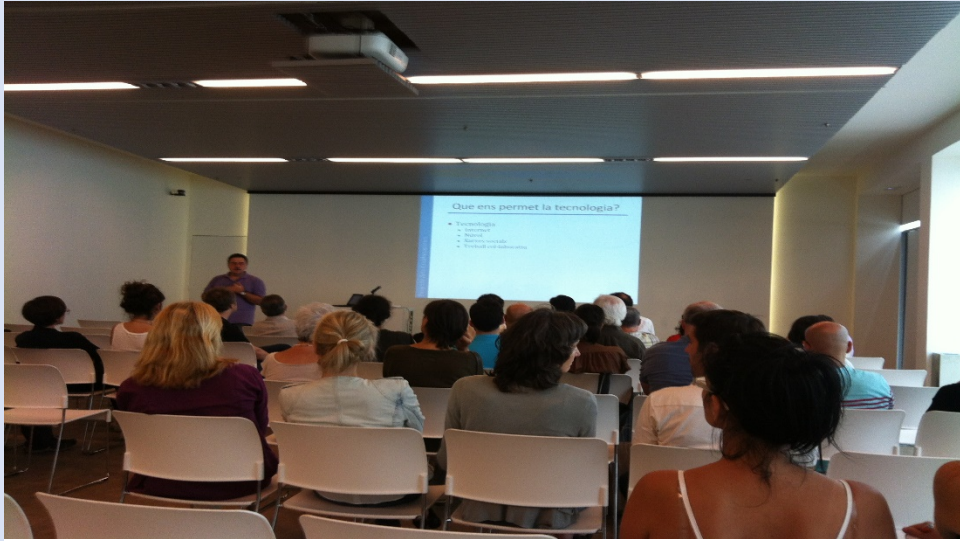
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In advance of any network launch, you will need to think about:

- Promotional material and communication methods
- How to get buy in from senior staff
- How you will respond to enquiries, eg helpline between certain hours, or email or telephone etc
- How many responses you might get. In theory, 1:7 of your employees will be affected by neuro diversity, so potentially you could get a lot of traffic.
- Resources for dealing with enquiries and signposting for further help.

There is a section later, on resources and where to go for help which will help you with your preparation.

## 6. Meetings



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Quite often networks are started with a launch event. Here are some things to think about for that.

- Individuals need to feel very safe to come along to something like this. Most ND people have been hiding their issues (and strengths!) for years. So it takes courage to come forward. How can you help with that?
- If you have a senior member of staff who is ND and willing to be open about it, that is a terrific person to speak at a launch event.
- The BDA can help with speakers for you but generally these have to be charged for because the Charity has to cover their costs. As an indicator typically for an afternoon or evening event, the charge would be £400 plus VAT. They are also in contact with some celebrities and so, if you are looking for that, then get in touch with [onsite@bdadyslexia.org.uk](mailto:onsite@bdadyslexia.org.uk) .
- Most ND individuals do not understand the nature of their strengths or challenges, it is rarely explained to them. So, an event about these conditions and the brain can be really interesting to all and create much better awareness within the workplace too.
- Another possible topic is about helping parents of children with dyslexia etc. This is often a way to encourage people to come who might not realise that they themselves have these conditions too.



## Chairing Meetings



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If you haven't run a meeting before, then here is a checklist of things to think about beforehand:

- Usually 1.5 hours is an appropriate time for a meeting with a speaker. You will need to make a timetable for yourself (eg 5 minutes for Introductions and H&S notices; 40 minutes for the presentation and up to 20 minutes for questions; 5 minutes for thank yous and to request volunteers to sign up to help you; 20 minutes for waiting for late arrivals and a bit of networking at the end of the meeting.)
- Your role as Chair is to ensure that the meeting runs to time, guests are well looked after, and that questions are fairly distributed (if one person tries to take up all the time, you need to intervene and request space for someone else to speak.)
- You need to set the agenda of the meeting and communicate to others when and where it will take place.

## Subsequent Meetings

The agenda for these will very much depend on your objectives and the feedback you get from others about what is required.

If you do decide to go for meetings though, it is worth planning them well in advance. This will enable you to build upon awareness within your workplace and to look at different aspects as every ND person is an individual with different things to offer and different needs.

Keep track of your achievements. This is useful to maintain motivation and energy for the network but also you can use it to persuade senior management to support the network.

## 7. Internal Social Networks



Lots of big employers are using sites like Yammer from Microsoft to create internal social networks. You may want to use your internal social media site to set up a virtual network or to communicate quickly with others. You can also set up a Facebook page specifically for your network (provided this doesn't breach organisational rules).

Social networks have two advantages, speed of activity and privacy for those who may not want to disclose publicly.

Here are some top tips for setting up and maintaining a social network.

- Find out if your organisation has an internal network you can tap into. Research any policies or rules on using it.
- Ensure that any content will be accurate, reliable and accessible.
- Make the content interesting, so that people want to come back to it.
- You might want to have a virtual event so that people are attracted to it, and you can advertise this through email or fliers.
- Try and get senior staff engaged in it, perhaps you can use the site to ask questions.
- Ensure that you have others to help run it.
- Once it's active, review it regularly and amend.
- Ensure that someone is monitoring it for offensive material and deal with that.

## 8. Other Ways to Network

Networking doesn't have mean meetings. You might want to think about these things as well or instead:

- Social events that permit networking
- Providing information, a service of an "internal adviser"
- Learning and development opportunities for network members
- Informing on process development, making sure that systems include accessibility

## 9. What to do if Things go Wrong



Things don't always go according to plan. Here are a few things that can go wrong and some solutions.

- You plan an event and almost no one turns up! Review your marketing of the event, was it enough, was it at a bad time like Friday evening, Try and get a few people interested and committed so that you have more people to help get the message out.
- The speaker gets stuck in traffic! Have a back up plan which could be simple, such as having some questions ready for people to ask each other to get a networking conversation going.
- You get swamped with questions! You won't be able to predict the responses you get so be prepared for almost anything. Make sure you have others helping you, so that you can spread the response to lots of queries. Create a FAQ sheet in advance with lots of signposting to other external sources that can help answer questions (see Resources below for this).

## 10. Persuading Senior Managers to be Engaged



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In order to get change in an organisation, you usually have to persuade someone senior to champion it. So here are a few ideas you can use to make a business case that supporting your dyslexic employees is a good idea.

- 1:7 of your employees will be affected, and 1:7 of your customers too. So enabling your employees to work smarter, and your customers to access your services is a good thing for the business.
- Refer to the Inclusion, Diversity or CSR policies, what goals do they state. You may be able to make a case on how these goals can be met by the network.
- Neuro diverse employees have particular talents such as atypical problem solving, creative thought and being able to see patterns in data or experiences. These are vital entrepreneurial talents that businesses need.
- We are being told that Brexit may mean a skills shortage, so developing existing talent is a clear advantage.
- It improves your reputation to be considered a moral and responsible employer. This is good for staff recruitment and retention. It also helps you grow your customer base.



## 11. Safeguarding



In everything you do, you need to be aware of safeguarding, yourself and others, some of whom may be quite vulnerable. This is what safeguarding means:

- Protecting their rights to live in safety, free from abuse and neglect.
- People and organisations working together to prevent the risk of abuse or neglect, and to stop them from happening.
- Making sure people's wellbeing is promoted, taking their views, wishes, feelings and beliefs into account.

In practice, this means in networks:

- Ensuring that people show respect for each other
- Behaving inclusively
- Thinking about potential risks and mitigating them.

## 12. Links to BDA and Other Resources



One of the key activities of most networks is signposting individuals to more information or support. Here are some of those links.

**BDA:** [www.bdadyslexia.org.uk](http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk)

The BDA is the largest charity in this arena. It runs a national helpline offering support for often complex enquiries by phone or by email. The contact details are [helpline@bdadyslexia.org.uk](mailto:helpline@bdadyslexia.org.uk) and telephone: 0333 405 4567

It has a huge amount of information on all aspects of dyslexia and specific learning difficulties. If you are looking for something in particular, send an email to the Helpline as not all the available resources are on the website.

BDA also has services such as screening on line (currently free), assessment, training, conferences, publications and membership. It runs the flagship International Conference every couple of years. The next one is on 10<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> April in the Telford Conference centre and is where the most recent research is published by academics and others.

**Local Dyslexia Associations:** There are 50 local associations (LDAs) across England and Wales. These are independent charities but are affiliated to BDA and many offer shared membership of both. LDAs know about local services, such as which is the best school for a dyslexic child. They run helplines too and some have meetings for adults. There is a list and contact details for the LDAs on the BDA website: <http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/membership/local-dyslexia-associations>

**Dyslexia Adult Network (DAN):** This is a steering committee composed of senior people in the relevant charities and six co-opted experts on dyslexia in adults. The aim of the network is to share information and campaign on key services for adults. DAN produces a newsletter quarterly and it is possible to sign up for this, contact [margaretmalpas@gmail.com](mailto:margaretmalpas@gmail.com)

**Dyslexia Scotland:** This is the dyslexia charity for Scotland, see [www.dyslexiascotland.org.uk](http://www.dyslexiascotland.org.uk). They are members of DAN, work closely with the BDA and have a particular interest in adults and the workplace. There are tools on their website that are helpful in this context.

**Dyslexia Foundation:** This smaller charity is based in Liverpool but also has outreach to Manchester. They offer services such as screening and assessment, and student support. See: [www.dyslexia-help.org](http://www.dyslexia-help.org)

**Helen Arkell Dyslexia Centre:** This charity is based in Surrey and is an accredited training centre for specialist teachers. It also provides assessment services. See: [www.helenarkell.org.uk](http://www.helenarkell.org.uk)

**ACAS:** Acas has some information on its site for employers which was written by BDA. It also has a blog written by Margaret Malpas. Acas has 90,000 enquiries to its Helpline and has seen an increasing number from both employers and ND employees asking for information and support. See: [www.acas.org.uk](http://www.acas.org.uk)

**Purple Space** is a networking hub for disabled employees. See: [www.purplespace.org](http://www.purplespace.org)

