Meeting the Needs of Neurodivergent Prisoners

INFORMATION FOR PRISON GOVERNORS AND SMTs

1. Neurodivergence – Terminology and Overview
2. How are people affected?
3. Issues of Support and Accessibility
4. Good Practice
5. Case Studies illustrating Reasonable Adjustments
6. Characteristics of common Neurodivergent Conditions and possible Accommodations

PLEASE NOTE
This resource only covers Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Dyscalculia and Autism (without so-occurring intellectual disability). These conditions are typified by the following: specific areas of functioning are affected and there is no correlation with overall intelligence.

They affect the way skills are acquired and how information is processed.

They are also characterised by poor short-term memory, inattention and weak organisational skills.

Although some people clearly have **difficulties in learning** despite not fitting any of the profiles we describe, the approaches outlined here may still be helpful.

This resource does NOT cover **Learning Disabilities** which are characterised by impairments of intelligence and social functioning.

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1a. Overview

This resource is limited to a family of conditions, namely:

- Dyslexia
- Dyspraxia
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Dyscalculia
- Autism without co-occurring intellectual disability.

All these conditions are on a continuum and often overlap with each other. Assessments generally reveal a 'spiky profile' of strengths and weaknesses.

SEE pages 14-18: Characteristics and possible Accommodations

Impaired '**executive function'** is a common experience of this neurodivergent population, affecting the following areas:

- Organisational and planning abilities
- Working memory (the capacity to hold information in your head whilst working on a task)
- Self-reflection and self-monitoring
- Time management and determining priorities
- Flexibility in choosing strategies
- Difficulty shifting attention OR following a change in the discourse

Prevalence in the general population

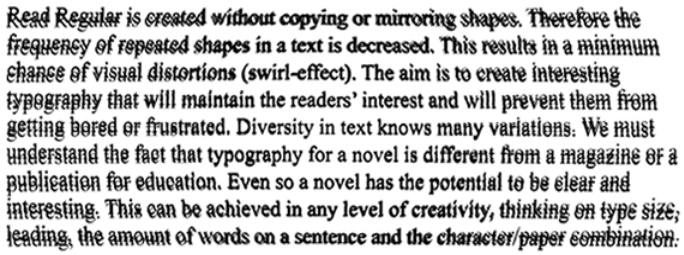
Studies show that around 10% of the general population is affected by this family of conditions (excluding Autism) with 5% severely affected.

Research Study showing prevalence in Offenders

The Incidence of Hidden Disabilities in the Prison Population (2005)
This study by Dyslexia Action investigated Dyslexia and related conditions in a range of prisons.

Conclusion: 52% have literacy difficulties, just under 20% have a hidden disability (such as ADHD) affecting learning & employment.

1b. People with Dyslexia and Dyspraxia may also show signs of Visual Stress


Read Regular is created without copying or mirroring shapes. Therefore the frequency of repeated shapes in a text is decreased. This results in a minimum chance of visual distortions (swirl-effect). The aim is to create interesting typography that will maintain the readers' interest and will prevent them from getting bored or frustrated. Diversity in text knows many variations. We must understand the fact that typography for a novel is different from a magazine or a publication for education. Even so a novel has the potential to be clear and interesting. This can be achieved in any level of creativity, thinking on type size, leading, the amount of words on a sentence and the character/paper combination.

Example of Visual Stress

Visual Stress makes reading very challenging.

It is also associated with migraines and epilepsy.

Symptoms include the following:

- losing the place, especially when transferring to the next line
- headaches and sore eyes when reading
- missing out and misreading words
- a glare from white paper
- perceived blurring or moving of text.

There are associated problems reading from a screen.

A checklist for poor readers with Visual Stress is available at www.dyslexia-malvern.co.uk/visualstress

Ways Forward

An optician's appointment to check whether reading glasses are needed.

Does a coloured overlay help? These should be available from Education.

The brightness of a computer screen can be dimmed and the background colour changed to a more 'comfortable' shade.

Forms, notices, digital systems should be designed with suitable adaptations to make them more 'accessible'.

➢ *Good practice is shown on page 8.*

The above are usually only partial solutions:

Once released, individuals experiencing Visual Stress should be directed to an optometrist specialising in this area.

They are listed, county by county, on www.ceriumoptical.com

1c. Abilities linked to Neurodivergence

These individuals possess a range of skills and abilities, which are often overlooked, such as:



- Creativity & originality
- Visuo-spatial skills
- Visualisation
- Intuitive approaches
- Lateral thinking / problem solving
- Affinity for colour / rhythm
- Entrepreneurship
- Good oral skills [in some cases]
- High attention to detail (a characteristic of Autism)



Unfortunately these abilities may be masked by the following factors:

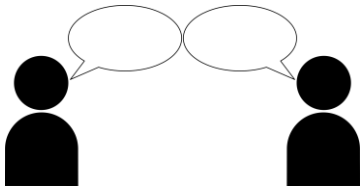
- negative experiences of schooling leading to under-achievement
- avoidance of education and training opportunities
- lack of confidence and low self-esteem.

It is therefore important to provide a taste of success, through participation in creative and practical activities, like Art, Music, Drama, Woodwork.
The subsequent raising of self-esteem will hopefully lead to engagement with education / training courses, possibly for the first time.
This, in turn, should improve chances of rehabilitation.

The documents **Ten Tips** and **Ten Steps** encourage individuals with Dyslexia and other 'specific' conditions to take stock and appreciate their unique way of applying their skills.
They can be downloaded free from www.dyslexia-malvern.co.uk/resources
These tools are particularly useful to people who've recently been assessed.

2a. How are people affected by Neurodivergence?

The associated with difficulties have a wide-ranging impact, *as shown in the Chart overleaf*.



This is how people describe the difficulties they face:

- a build up of stress until we cannot function at all
- coping with strangers and 'reading people' in unfamiliar settings
- processing what we are being told - and retaining what has been said
- problems maintaining concentration and focus
- feelings of sensory overload - from bright lights and loud noises etc.
- difficulty providing consistent information when questioned
- struggling to put our point across and find the right words
- maintaining eye contact during conversations
- problems reading accurately or writing clearly
- anxiety about getting lost and remembering *where* we have to be *when.*

This is relevant in everyday prison life & in processes such as Adjudications.

How well people cope depends on several factors:

(1) the severity of their symptoms

(2) the level of underlying intelligence

(3) the ability to deploy coping strategies

(4) stress levels.

Stress has a disproportionate effect on many neurodivergent people, often rendering them completely dysfunctional.

PLEASE NOTE

- Challenging behaviour may mask neurodivergence.

- People with these conditions may also have a mental health problem and have already been picked up by Healthcare.

2b. SUMMARY of the impact and implications of a range of difficulties associated with Neurodivergence

AREAS OF DIFFICULTY	IMPACT and IMPLICATIONS
Poor reading skills and / or Visual Stress affecting reading	Underachievement in literacy areas. Struggles to cope with form-filling. Unable to heed notices. Struggles with OBPs. Avoids education & training courses.
Poor speaking & listening skills	Misunderstandings arise leading to trouble. Can appear evasive and uncooperative. Requires thinking time before responding. Frustration/anger when cannot communicate.
Short attention span **High levels of distractibility**	Becomes overloaded and 'switches off'. Easily distracted, may distract or annoy others.
Weak short-term memory	Forgets information / oral instructions. Cannot retain learning without using strategies.
Weak working memory	Struggles to hold on to information whilst undertaking a task or during verbal interaction.
Poor organisation	Fails to turn up at the right place/time/day.
Confuse left/right. **Disorientation**	Trouble locating venues. Easily becomes lost.
Lack of numeracy or dyscalculia	Struggles with dates/times/money, retaining pin and prisoner numbers.
Low self-esteem and confidence	Unwilling to take up opportunities. May be very suggestible.

A combination of these factors may have led to failure to comply with licence requirements and to subsequent recall.

Further issues, such as substance misuse and head injury, will affect behaviour and memory.

3a. Issues of Support and Accessibility

The route to support is as follows:
Screening on entry should pick up the likelihood of these conditions.
Assessment, via the education providers, for all who screen positive.
Support includes measures to raise self-esteem, value skills and increase engagement. These may take the form of *Reasonable Adjustments* to aid accessibility and participation and *Additional Learning Support* to be drawn down, as needed, for those on education.

Mandating support for neurodivergent prisoners should help improve rehabilitation outcomes.

These conditions will be harder to identify in **Foreign Nationals.**
Nevertheless, this should be taken into account as it will affect their ability to progress through the system.

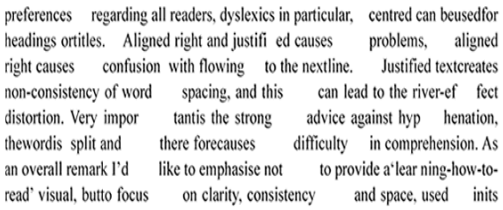
The contexts of **Disability, Equality and Diversity** should also ensure that support is provided via *Reasonable Adjustments*.
According to the **Equality Act 2010**, disability is a 'protected characteristic', requiring us to make *Reasonable Adjustments* to remove barriers [*page 9*].
The difficulties connected with neurodivergence will often amount to a disability, under the terms of the Equality Act.

The **Public Sector Equality Duty 2011** requires equality considerations to be reflected in the design of policies including internal policies, and the delivery of services, and for these issues to be kept under review.

The **Equalities and Diversity framework**, based around the nine 'protected characteristics' in the Equality Act, should include mandatory and guidance sections and illustrate *Reasonable Adjustments*.

Mandation 12: forms and digital systems available and/or designed with suitable adaptations to support those with dyslexia and other LDD *outdated term*

3b. Accessible Written Communications


preferences regarding all readers, dyslexics in particular, centred can beusedfor headings ortitles. Aligned right and justifi ed causes problems, aligned right causes confusion with flowing to the nextline. Justified textcreates non-consistency of word spacing, and this can lead to the river-ef fect distortion. Very impor tantis the strong advice against hyp henation, thewordis split and there forecauses difficulty in comprehension. As an overall remark I'd like to emphasise not to provide a'lear ning-how-to-read' visual, butto focus on clarity, consistency and space, used inits

Various measures can help minimise Visual Stress and improve readability. Justified text makes it harder for the reader to transfer to the next line accurately and introduces irregular spacing, described as 'streams of white'.

Some people read by a 'whole word recognition strategy' but the distinctive shape of a word is lost when whole words are capitalised.

General Guidance for Digital Text & Written Communications

- ✓ short sentences; main points picked out in bold
- ✓ graphics to flag up content (which must always be relevant)
- ✓ boxed summaries of key information
- ✓ any shading should be pale and only overprinted by black text
- ✓ flow-charts to explain procedures and diagrams where appropriate
- ✓ rather than continuous text, use short lists such as 'Do's and Don'ts'
- ✓ glossary of terms & abbreviations provided at the start of each section

Summary of Adaptations to Forms and Notices

DO USE	DON'T USE
• adequately sized fonts, at least size 12	• small fonts (below size 12)
• good spacing	• cramped text
• justify left (leave a ragged right margin)	• (right) justified or centred text
• selective use of bold and bullet points	• WHOLE WORDS AND PHRASES IN CAPITALS
• sans serif fonts e.g Arial, Verdana Tahoma	• 'fancy' or unusual fonts and *italics*
• pictograms, graphics diagrams, charts	• printing in either red or green
Aim for a clear uncluttered page	**Avoid busy, overcrowded pages**

4. Good Practice and Reasonable Adjustments

The three-part duty to make *Reasonable Adjustments* is outlined in the Equality Act as follows:

1. Changing practices, policies and procedures which place disabled people at a substantial disadvantage
2. Overcoming barriers caused by the physical environment
3. Taking reasonable steps to provide auxiliary aids or services

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*Do **staff** feel able to disclose their own neurodivergence and ask for support, as required?*

<u>Disseminating the following Dyslexia-friendly practices will also be of benefit to many others who are struggling.</u>

1. Staff should **check the database** for a record of an individual's screening or assessment.

2. A **buddy system** could be an effective way of supporting individuals in managing their everyday challenges (ideally pairing the individual with someone who is aware of neurodivergent difficulties)

3. Make **instructions** positive, rather than negative e.g.
SAY "Remember to turn the computer off after your session".
NOT "Don't leave the room without turning off the computer".

Give spoken instructions one at a time, pausing between each.
Provide a series of written instructions in a clear uncluttered format using numbered short items. *Further detail on 'accessibility' on previous page.*

4. Provide a completed version of any **forms**, so this can be followed as a guide, making it easier to see what information is required.

5. Keep copies of **passwords** etc. in case these are lost or forgotten – while encouraging individuals to use memory aids and association techniques to memorise key codes and information.

6. Allow extra time for tasks requiring **reading and writing**, offering discreet help such as summarising content in advance.

7. In any **learning situation,** break the task down into steps or chunks and demonstrate. Enable the individual to 'have a go', ask questions and make mistakes without ridicule or negativity. Then provide opportunities for over-learning and rehearsal, until the new information or skills become automatic. Ask an individual how they might wish to approach a task.

PLEASE NOTE. If someone is **dyspraxic**, it will take them longer to learn practical tasks; never ask them to mirror you as you demonstrate, go alongside them instead.
They will also struggle with charts and diagrammatic information.

8. Provide **information in advance** to enable decision-making, and reduce stress.

9. Where possible, give advance notice of any **changes,** especially to regular routines. The impact of sudden changes may cause considerable distress. Strategies for managing the change may need to be developed.
This is especially relevant for people on the autistic spectrum.

10. Consider the skills required to **participate in an OBP or workshop**, and what *Reasonable Adjustments* or aids could be put in place to enable fuller participation for individuals who have a range of difficulties.
Given the widespread nature of neurodivergence, it is highly likely that staff will encounter individuals with these conditions.

The **Shannon Trust Reading Plan**, whereby prisoners who CAN read become mentors to those with limited or no literacy, is available in most establishments.
Mentors are trained by the Shannon Trust to work in pairs with poor readers using the *Turning Pages* manuals.
The step-by-step methodology and built-in repetition of the Reading Plan is especially helpful for dyslexic learners and those who struggle with English.

The following CASE STUDIES illustrate a range of neurodivergent difficulties and suggest helpful measures / *Reasonable Adjustments*.

These are followed by a page detailing the most common conditions.

5. Case Studies and Reasonable Adjustments

CASE STUDY ONE Mark

Mark has a long history of offending, often involving violence and assault. He is currently serving a long sentence for armed robbery. He was expelled from school for disruptive behaviour. Hating what he described as "constant humiliation" he decided to go back and "torch the place"'. He began to use drugs as a way of trying to calm himself down.

Describing himself as "thick", Mark avoids learning, especially in group situations, where he is wary of being put on the spot and being exposed in front of others. He says he can't keep up with tutors and forgets instructions.

On a daily basis, Mark is fairly chaotic, often being late for appointments or missing them. Well known on the Wing for his short fuse and quick temper, Mark finds it hard to wait his turn in the meal or phone queue.

Mark is very articulate but will tend to go off at a tangent in discussions, and frequently interrupts; if he is interrupted, he loses his train of thought.

He is known for being very practical and naturally good at fixing things, with an excellent photographic memory. Despite a tough exterior, he has low confidence and poor self-esteem. He would love to learn how to use computers as he thinks they could be interesting and help him catch up.

Ways Forward and Reasonable Adjustments could include:

- Checking that initial screening has led to a referral for assessment.
- Healthcare appointment to explore his impulsivity and hyperactivity.
- Starting him on a basic ICT course, with a learning mentor for 1-1 help.
- Offering practical workshops – allowing him to take breaks as needed.
- Enabling him to use ICT for personal organisation, including making and printing off his own calendar.
- Yoga, meditation (Prison Phoenix Trust classes/materials); stress balls.
- A buddy on the wing, to help Mark monitor his emotional volatility.

Mark was later assessed as having ADHD

CASE STUDY TWO: Rudi (Romanian)

A Prison Officer describes a prisoner under stress:

"I'd known Rudi for a bit. He was a clumsy lad, big and all over the place somehow. Anyway he'd got quite wound up about the Adjudication. When the governor asked him some questions to clarify the situation Rudi didn't seem able to answer without striding about the room waving his arms about, as though he had to use his whole body to help the words out.
His English was ok, - he'd been over here quite some time – he was always getting books out of the library.

And I don't know what happened to his volume control! His voice came out very loud and aggressive. He rambled on and on as though he was trying to avoid the question.

Rudi kept staring at these scruffy notes he'd brought in with him but didn't seem to be able to make sense of them. By the end he was almost weeping with frustration. I really felt quite sorry for him.**"**

The Features of Rudi's behaviour indicate that he could be dyspraxic.

This Case Study is a reminder that Foreign National prisoners may also be neurodivergent.

Ways Forward and Reasonable Adjustments could include:

Measures to help reduce stress at the Adjudication (or a Parole Hearing)

- Questions to be provided to Rudi in advance of the Adjudication.
- Rudi should be allowed to bring his Offender Manager, or a friend.
- An agreed signal to remind Rudi that his voice is getting too loud.

Generally helpful measures

- Train him to word process using a voice recognition program, to get round his problem of poor handwriting and scruffy written presentation.
- Encourage Rudi to take regular exercise and/or a yoga class.
- Careful consideration of how his skills could be developed.

At some stage he might wish to train as a Shannon Trust Reading Plan mentor and help another prisoner to read.

These measures should raise self-esteem and improve Rudi's well-being.

CASE STUDY THREE: Maggie

Maggie left school at 14 without taking any GCSEs. She was a persistent truant; this soon led to petty offending. Cautions followed, then short sentences as her offending escalated.

While under the YOT, Maggie was assessed as dyslexic but there appears to be something in addition to this. She shows a complete lack of awareness of others and often panics in social situations, becoming violent and uncontrollable. On one occasion she was convicted for criminal damage and assault when challenged at the Job Centre.

In prison, Maggie is a loner and has not engaged with any activities. She has lost privileges after verbally abusing her Offender Manager after a meeting was changed without notice.

Though clearly intelligent, Maggie always takes everything literally. She recently disclosed that, despite her Dyslexia, she would love to be able to read better and pursue her all-absorbing interest in animals.

Ways Forward and Reasonable Adjustments could include:

- Revisiting her screening results on the database; do these indicate factors that could be consistent with Autsim?
- Drawing up an awareness sheet for staff and circulating as necessary, with the aim of minimising incidents arising from unplanned change.
- Trying to give advance notice of any changes in routine and, where not possible, handling the situation with sensitivity.
- Looking into allocation of a peer helper, to monitor Maggie's stress levels and help her cope. (*The National Autistic Society can advise*)
- Keeping verbal and written instructions brief and unambiguous.
- Always allowing thinking time for Maggie to respond verbally.
- Referring Maggie to the Shannon Trust Reading Plan for 1-1 support in developing her reading skills – the mentor would need special briefing.
- Exploring a career path that could lead to working with animals.

6. Core characteristics of common neurodivergent Conditions

Characteristics of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder [ADHD]

ADHD has three major aspects:

Inattention: distractibility, problems remaining focused, failing to pay attention, missing the detail, not realising the consequences of actions or taking account of feedback. People with ADHD may appear bored or indifferent or have become overloaded and 'switched off'.

Impulsivity: poor inhibition and turn-taking, leading to interrupting and blurting out comments. Chaotic. Erratic and risky behaviour.

Hyperactivity: restless, attention seeking, accident/addiction-prone.

Where there is no hyperactivity (**Attention Deficit Disorder**), the individual seems dreamy, 'spaced-out', rarely on task and lacking in concentration.

Possible Accommodations for ADHD

- Allow for regular breaks to restore concentration. Ask him/her to let you know when it is no longer possible to maintain attention.

- Distractibility might lessen if s/he is allowed to doodle or jot while working or during formal interactions.

- Try and provide an environment with minimal distractions. Seat the individual away from windows and doors.

- Do not be put off by fidgeting and signs of restlessness. S/he may manage to communicate better if allowed to move around.

- 'Chunking' is beneficial, i.e. breaking information up into smaller/shorter sections. Provide immediate feedback.

- Medication can help with excessive hyperactivity – an appointment should be made with Healthcare to explore possibilities.

Characteristics of <u>Dyscalculia</u> [inability to grasp number concepts]

Dyscalculia affects many areas of everyday life, these include:

- time telling
- handling money, budgeting, dealing with finances
- using pin numbers and dialling phone numbers
- remembering personal information (such as date of birth, addresses, post codes) and recalling personal numbers such as phone numbers
- travel (ROTL): mistakes with bus, platform or road numbers, making sense of timetables
- reading or recording appointment times and dates correctly
- number aspects of vocational training, work preparation courses etc.

Possible Accommodations for Dyscalculia

- Where possible words should be used in place of numbers eg 9/3/19 shown as 9th March 2019. Cards should be provided showing the number as a word next to corresponding digit, from 1-20, then 30,40 etc. up to 100 and 1,000.

- Times should be written as am/pm NOT as 24 hour clock, and accompanied by drawing of clock face showing the corresponding time.

- A wall calendar is needed with key appointments entered in.

- Help is required to 'decode' timetables and other number-based listings.

TUTORS

- Work with concrete materials before tackling paper-based tasks.
- Associate the name of the number with the symbol, practice identifying relative size of numbers. Clarify the language of maths e.g. *plus, add, more than* <u>all</u> mean a number getting bigger.
- Develop 'numerosity' by simple number sequencing activities, e.g. identifying the *fifth* item on a till receipt.
- Link coins with numbers, then sequence them according to value.

Characteristics of Dyslexia

- Educational under-achievement.
- Slow reading; even if reading is mastered it is hard to retain content.
- Difficulties with spelling and expressing thoughts in writing.
- Weak listening skills e.g. problems following the argument; inattention.
- Weak speaking skills e.g. poor word retrieval, going off at a tangent.
- Short-term and working memory problems. *SEE Chart on page 6*
- Organisation and time-management are usually affected.
- Poor sequencing skills; everyday sequences never become automatic.
- May suffer from Visual Stress. *SEE pages 3 and 8*
- Usually has a short attention span; fails to engage if the matter is not of personal interest.

Possible Accommodations for Dyslexia

- When giving information, follow up with questions to check important points such as “So what do you need to do now?” NOT “Do you understand?”.

- Written materials/notices should conform to good practice in minimising Visual Stress (*page 8*)

- Aim to provide reminders in spoken and written form.

- During interviews/questioning stick to chronological order. Ask single questions rather than compound ones.

- Be aware that inconsistency in supplying routine information may be due to Dyslexia. Sequencing and references to left/right may be inaccurate.

- In general terms, people with Dyslexia find it helpful to be presented with an overview, before going into details.

- Never ask someone who might have Dyslexia to read aloud.

Characteristics of Dyspraxia

- Clumsiness: tripping up, bumping into people. Lack manual dexterity.
- Inability to work at speed and process information rapidly.
- Speech and language: speech may be unclear and overloud (sounding rude or aggressive).
- Poor social skills: e.g. judging socially acceptable behaviour, misunderstanding situations. May take things literally.
- Weak short term memory, together with poor organisational skills and decision making; difficulty retrieving information 'on the spot'.
- Poor time management: poor allocation of time or recognising the urgency of situations.
- Difficulty managing change and new routines, struggle to re-schedule.
- Poor visual-spatial skills, problems with charts, maps, timetables etc.
- Poor orientation, getting lost easily, struggling with directions.

Possible Accommodations for Dyspraxia

- Many of the Accommodations for DYSLEXIA apply, but reading is usually less problematic.

- Would they prefer to dictate information for forms, due to awkward handwriting?

- May struggle with over-sensitivity to light and noise. Can low watt bulbs be used in cell?

- Easily distracted, breaks may be needed during any sessions.

- Great difficulty with navigation and finding their way around. Information about venues should contain landmarks as well as directions. It may help to talk through the route or, ideally, accompany them, pointing out landmarks.

Autism is included in this Resource, due to its frequent overlap with Dyslexia and Dyspraxia.

Characteristics of Autism (without co-occurring intellectual disability)

People with Autism, experience difficulties in three key areas:

1. **Poor communication skills**, leading to difficulty understanding instructions or retelling an incident; taking words or phrases too literally.
2. **Impaired social skills**: difficulty understanding socially acceptable behaviour, taking account of the needs of others, 'reading' body language.
3. **Inflexible thinking:** difficulty following procedures, coping with unplanned change; over-reliance on routines. High levels of stress and anxiety.

This is often accompanied by unusual behaviours including comfort behaviours. Hyper-sensitivity to touch, taste, noise and/or light is common. They may find it hard to maintain eye contact. Personal space is important. An obsessive interest in something/someone may have got them into trouble.

They often lack insight and have an idiosyncratic understanding of the world around them. Despite adequate intelligence, speed of information processing is slow, together with a panic reaction when pushed - this may include verbal or physical over-reaction.

Possible Accommodations

- Formal interviews are easier to manage if questions are written and submitted in advance. Answers can then be considered and written down.
- Ask specific questions rather than open questions. Avoid abstract concepts, metaphor and nuances. Allow ‘time out’ to recover during any sessions.
- Provide a set of rules, carefully explaining any exceptions.
- In restorative processes, take into account that showing empathy and seeing things from someone else’s point of view may not be possible.
- Take steps to accommodate any hyper-sensitivity.