

**Stonewall**

# ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

**This resource is produced by Stonewall, a UK-based charity that stands for the freedom, equity and potential of all lesbian, gay, bi, trans, queer, questioning and ace (LGBTQ+) people.**

At Stonewall, we imagine a world where LGBTQ+ people everywhere can live our lives to the full.

Founded in London in 1989, we now work in each nation of the UK and have established partnerships across the globe. Over the last three decades, we have created transformative change in the lives of LGBTQ+ people in the UK, helping win equal rights around marriage, having children and inclusive education.

Our campaigns drive positive change for our communities, and our sustained change and empowerment programmes ensure that LGBTQ+ people can thrive throughout our lives. We make sure that the world hears and learns from our communities, and our work is grounded in evidence and expertise.

To find out more about our work, visit us at [www.stonewall.org.uk](http://www.stonewall.org.uk)

**Registered Charity No 1101255 (England and Wales) and SC039681 (Scotland)**

Stonewall is proud to provide information, support and guidance on LGBTQ+ inclusion; working towards a world where we're all free to be. This does not constitute legal advice, and is not intended to be a substitute for legal counsel on any subject matter.

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**STONEWALL  
YOUNG FUTURES**

**Insights from disabled  
and /or neurodivergent  
LGBTQ+ young people**

## Background

Recent UK government NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) statistics show that disabled people aged 16-24 are more than twice as likely to not be in education, training or work. 28% of disabled 16–24-year-olds are not in education, training or work compared to 8% of those who aren't disabled. ([House of Commons Research Briefing, July 2021](#))

In May 2022, Stonewall ran a youth focus group for disabled and/or neurodivergent LGBTQ+ young people. The group ran for two hours and took place online, with 7 disabled and/or neurodivergent LGBTQ+ young people taking part. The session was facilitated by an external Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) consultant.

**“I don’t actually know what reasonable adjustments I need from a workplace, because I don’t think I’ve actually ever been offered that support from a workplace, so I don’t have any examples to grasp onto” - focus group participant**



The session aimed to gather information about the specific barriers and challenges that disabled and/or neurodivergent LGBTQ+ young people face when accessing education, training and work, and what resources and support they need to overcome these challenges.

## Challenges

Participants in focus group spoke about significant challenges they face due to their individual and intersecting identities.

Young people were scared to disclose their disability or neurodivergence during the job application process, worrying it may impact their chances of being hired.

Participants were also worried about the assumptions employers or colleagues would make about them due to their disability or neurodivergence, such as that they're not capable or not intelligent.



**“It feels such a gamble when applying for a job whether I should disclose that I’m autistic. I have no idea if an employer will be ethical. I feel like I’m not going to get the job if I tell them” - focus group participant**

Young people were scared that if they disclosed their disability or neurodivergence, they would be tokenised by their employers and be expected to take responsibility for educating others in the workplace on disability and neurodivergence or queer identities.

Because of fear of disclosing their disability or neurodivergence, and due to not having disabled or neurodivergent role models in the workplace, some young people felt that they had to "try and not be disabled".

Young people that didn't have a formal diagnosis didn't feel they could ask for reasonable adjustments or found it harder to have their requests granted by their employers.

**“I couldn’t name what the condition I was struggling with at the time and my workplace wanted me to be able to put a label on the problems I was having. It was just not very helpful when I asked for adjustments because they just refused” - focus group participant**

Many neurodivergent young people felt that employers weren't clear enough about how they would support neurodivergent young people in the workplace and found accessibility guidelines around neurodiversity really unclear.

Some young people said that because they'd never been offered any support from employers, they have no frame of reference for what's possible. They were unsure what an accessible workplace could look like and what they could ask for.

## Support and Guidance

Due to the significant barriers disabled and/or neurodivergent LGBTQ+ young people face when entering education, training or work, the support they said they needed was varied.

Support should be provided through all stages of the job application process and during employment, including the probationary period. Young people should be offered concrete and practical guidance on coping with the challenges they face.



Participants told us they need:

- Examples of what an accessible workplace can look like and someone who can let them know that they *are* allowed to ask for reasonable adjustments.
- To know that they could ask for reasonable adjustments in the application and interview process, what those reasonable adjustments could be, and how to ask for them. This would preferably be from a trusted source, like an LGBTQ+ person or a disabled person who works in HR.
- Resources on asking for reasonable adjustments once they're in an education, training or work setting. This could be guidance on what they can ask for and how to do it, and training workshops to build confidence and speak to a manager about their needs.
- Guidance on what constitutes discrimination in the workplace, how to recognise it, and what to do about it.
- Guidance on what to do if their employer denies their request for reasonable adjustments or if they are being tokenised, for example.
- Signposting to services that can provide direct support and advocacy for them in the process of asking for reasonable adjustments.
- More spaces that are explicitly for disabled and neurodivergent LGBTQ+ young people, where they could be authentically themselves without having to hide facets of their identity.



**“Seeing people like you or who share experiences with you is a really powerful thing in and of itself - especially when you see people like you being supported, championed, included and centered” - focus group participant**

## Presenting Information

Participants in the focus group also spoke about the best ways for them to access the information and resources listed above:

- Young people differed in opinion about their preferred way of receiving information. Some expressed a preference for written text whilst others preferred videos or podcasts.
- Young people emphasised that information needed to be short, concise and useful: videos shouldn't be too long, and text would ideally be in bullet-points and split into small, precise sections by theme.
- Content should be as accessible as possible, including alt-text for images and audio descriptions for videos where possible.
- The tone of the content should be warm, empathetic, and encouraging to young people - helping them be their proud, authentic selves. Testimonials from other disabled and neurodivergent LGBTQ+ people are also important.

**“Keep reinforcing the message that everyone has the right to be their unique self - without having to mask or edit themselves or miss out on experiences they want to have!” - focus group participant**