

Inclusion Statement

Have you ever felt that you needed to do something like fidget, pace, turn a camera off in an online meeting to really engage? Have you ever struggled to focus in a meeting or on a presentation but were worried that you may be judged negatively for doing so?

Well – our Autistic and Think Tank team members feel the same. However, they didn't always feel safe to use the strategies that help them, even at Aspect! This shows how important it is to explicitly welcome people, and invite them to use their own strategies. It's why we developed an Inclusion Statement, and use it in all of our meetings, events, and classrooms. We noticed it helped all of our non-autistic teammates too, as everyone has their own requirements for working well.

Creating an inclusive environment where everyone feels safe to be their authentic selves is important for building engagement and productivity within organisations. Incorporating an inclusion statement into daily business activities, such as meetings and presentations, can significantly contribute to this goal, and serves as a valuable model for promoting inclusivity.

Aspect's Inclusion Statement:

"Everybody is welcome [in this training/meeting/office/event]. We want you to feel it is OK to be authentically yourself. Please let us know if there is anything we can do that helps to make you feel more comfortable. Everyone is welcome to use their own strategies to help them feel engaged and relaxed."

Our purpose a different brilliant®

Understanding, engaging
and celebrating the strengths,
interests and aspirations of people
on the autism spectrum.

The statement, co-developed with Autistic staff, lets people know that they are welcome to be their authentic selves during a meeting, encouraging people to do whatever they feel they might need to, in order to be comfortable and to facilitate better participation.

The statement acknowledges that there are strategies that can help some people feel more productive and engaged with a meeting or event. It can also help people feel comfortable to ask for any small accommodations they need to make the most of a session, or to know how best to contribute or to ask for help or clarification.

When an Inclusion Statement is incorporated into the beginning of a meeting, it is important that it genuinely be ok for meeting participants to do what is required to participate fully.

The Inclusion Statement has also been turned into a poster, which is proudly displayed at all Aspect schools and offices across Australia.

Inclusion Statement



Implementing an Inclusion Statement in your organisation:

1. Develop the statement:

Collaborative creation: Involve a diverse group of employees, including those with lived experiences to co-develop the inclusion statement. This ensures the statement resonates with and addresses the needs of all staff members.

2. Incorporate into daily activities:

- Meetings: Begin each meeting by reading the inclusion statement aloud. This practice sets a welcoming tone and reminds participants that they are encouraged to be themselves.
- This could sit after an acknowledgement of country.
- Presentations: Display the inclusion statement at the start of all presentations to reinforce the organisation's commitment to inclusivity.

3. In the statement, encourage personal context-specific comfort strategies:

Acknowledge and support various strategies individuals may use to stay comfortable and engaged, such as:

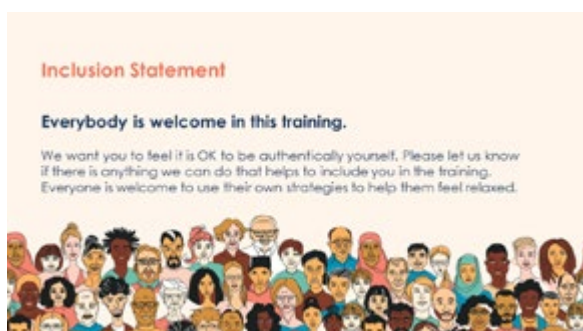
- Walking around during meetings;
- Using fidget tools;
- Allowing cameras to be off during virtual meetings;
- Recognising and accommodating background activities, like a child being present; and
- Suggest that, to be able to speak, people can raise a hand, to develop a simple visual system to promote engagement.

4. Display the statement prominently:

Create posters of the inclusion statement and display them in common areas, meeting rooms, and other prominent locations within the workplace to continually reinforce the message.

5. Solicit feedback and make adjustments:

Regularly seek feedback from employees on the effectiveness and impact of the inclusion statement and be open to making adjustments to better meet the needs of all staff members.



The Inclusion Statement in action

In 2024, Aspect Autism Friendly worked closely with Helium Pictures and the ABC on their new show 'The Assembly', where Australia's most renowned interviewer, Leigh Sales, mentors Autistic journalism students as they learn their craft and interview well known Australian personalities.

At the beginning of every interview in 'The Assembly', one of the student journalists addresses everyone in the room to say "This is a safe space". What follows is an explicit encouragement for all the audience to genuinely relax, to be themselves, and to use whatever strategies they need to be part of the interview.

Aspect introduced the Inclusion Statement at the very beginning of the Macquarie University journalism course to let the students know they can be themselves. Then, Aspect's Autism Friendly team wrote an Inclusion Statement for 'The Assembly' to make sure that the students and celebrities felt as welcome and comfortable as they could for the filming of each interview.

Benefits of an Inclusion Statement – why is this important?

- **Enhanced participation:** When individuals feel accepted and supported, they are more likely to actively participate and contribute.
- **Improved well-being:** Encouraging employees to use personal comfort strategies can reduce stress and promote overall well-being.
- **Strengthened organisational culture:** A clear commitment to inclusion fosters a culture of respect, understanding, and collaboration.

By adopting and integrating an inclusion statement into daily business practices, organisations can create a more welcoming environment that values and supports the diverse needs of all employees. An Inclusion Statement is one small component of developing a genuinely inclusive culture.

Aspect offers a comprehensive approach, based on the idea of a different brilliant®, that:

- Respects difference and diversity
- Builds a person's skills based on their strengths, interests, aspirations and support needs
- Develops autism-friendly environments
- Supports others to understand and embrace autism and to develop respectful supportive interactions.