

# Neurodiversity in frontline policing

**N**eurodiversity touches every aspect of modern-day policing, from how police forces recruit and train officers and staff, how they understand the neurodiverse communities they serve, how to secure best evidence when dealing with neurodivergent suspects, witnesses and victims, to how they handle professional standards and internal HR issues involving neurodivergent people.

Undoubtedly the police service has made significant improvements in its awareness and understanding of neurodiversity in recent years, but there is still a long way to go to improve community confidence and truly reflect the diverse communities they serve.

Key to increasing public confidence and engagement is the need for frontline police officers and staff to understand the challenges that neurodivergent suspects, victims and witnesses might have when interacting with law enforcement.

There are often really simple adjustments that can be made to policing practices which can have a positive impact and increase engagement. The first step is understanding which have the most impact on neurodivergent individuals. For example, it can be as straightforward as making sure officers and staff are using the right language in relation to neurodiversity.

Undoubtedly, the use of force, the process of arrest and the custody experience can all have a negative impact on someone who is neurodivergent. Police officers and staff need to understand the impact in use of force training, the impact of the sensory environment around them, and even how the body of someone who is neurodivergent might interpret pain when being handcuffed.

It can also be about the custody experience and understanding how the custody environment and processes might affect someone who is neurodivergent in a different way to someone who is not. Answering bail and the interview process can present challenges around executive function, for example, remembering appointments, arriving in time, the ability to focus and maintain concentration during a police interview... All of these areas can present challenges for neurodivergent individuals.

Policing needs to understand the pinch points and triggers and, more importantly, understand the strategies and adjustments that can be made to make a positive difference.

There has been groundbreaking research around the impact of the interview process and custody environment. This has resulted in some significant changes to the physical environments in custody and where interviews can take place.

We have learnt a lot in the past few years about how interview questions can be changed so that the meaning and understanding of the questions is improved and best evidence from neurodivergent people is secured.

There has also been better understanding of how a neurodivergent person experiencing a meltdown might 'present'. Police may think that that the person is kicking off and being aggressive rather than a presentation of overwhelm, resulting in a meltdown. How officers recognise and react to this will be the difference between making it much worse or helping to de-escalate the crisis.

It is an ongoing conversation, backed up by research, which can help policing make strategic decisions about how frontline officers are trained and how they engage with their neurodivergent communities to increase public confidence and engagement.

It is important, because policing needs to reflect the communities it serves and truly understand what those communities need from them. Frontline police teams across the UK have a golden opportunity at the moment, because of increased awareness, to start conversations around neurodiversity and engagement, and make changes through their practices and processes, which will not only improve their relationships with the neurodivergent community, but also enable them to secure best evidence as part of the criminal justice process.



**Caroline Turner**  
CEO and Founder  
Creased Puddle

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### Managing Editors

Paul Jacques  
paulj@policeprofessional.com

Tony Thompson  
tony@policeprofessional.com  
@PolicePEditor

### Contributors

Paul Jacques, Tony Thompson,  
Professor John Coxhead,  
Caroline Turner, Alan Collins,  
Andrew Williams, Dr Emma Treby,  
Kerry Seymour, Gary Johannes,  
Professor Colin Rogers, Helen Martin,  
Stan Popovich.

### Editorial

Tel: 0333 320 8004

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subscriptions@policeprofessional.com

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