



# Belonging by Design: Meetings

*A guide for workplaces to create environments where misfits thrive*

Written by: [Jace Malz](#) and [Stella Nelson](#)

Misfits is for the weird, sensitive, neurodivergent, queer, and rebellious souls who've never quite fit the mold. Through trauma-informed coaching, bold conversations, and creative spaces, Misfits helps people show up more fully, belong without compromise, and reimagine how we live and work.

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# Inclusion is a design choice.

**We know people learn, process, and show up in wildly different ways. Meetings are where power, belonging, and culture come to life. This guide is your invitation to reimagine them, so they feel inclusive, human, and misfit-friendly. Don't worry about doing it all at once. Try one shift. See what happens. Come back and try another. Small, intentional practices ripple into big, lasting change.**

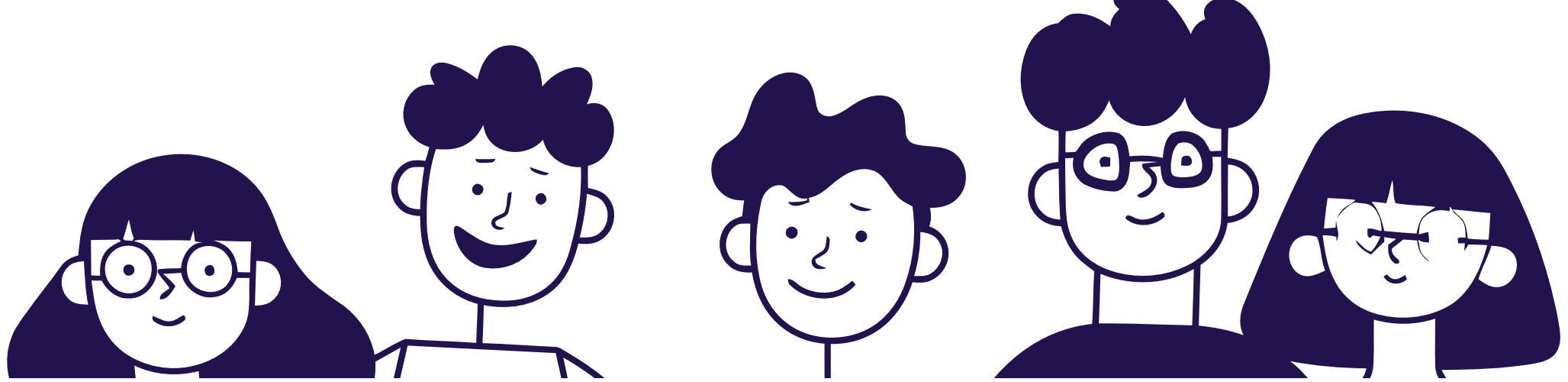




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## What This Guide Helps You Do:



### **Design meetings where people feel safe, not silenced**

Create spaces where everyone can contribute authentically without fear



### **Intervene in moments of harm with skill and clarity**

Learn techniques to address microaggressions and create accountability



### **Root norms in consent, not compliance**

Establish practices that respect autonomy, energy and individual boundaries



### **Make space for multiple ways of learning, speaking, processing**

Honour neurodiversity and different communication styles



### **Lead with humility and humour**

Lead with vulnerability and openness to create psychological safety



# Neurodiversity and Processing Time

## Assumption:

**Quick responses = intelligence.** Everyone should be able to speak up quickly or "think on their feet."

## Reality:

**Processing time = depth, equity and better ideas.** Many people (especially neurodivergent thinkers) need time to process before contributing. Quick responses aren't a measure of intelligence or engagement.

## What changes when this becomes the norm:

Ideas deepen, fewer people are left behind, and decisions improve.



## Benefits for those who need it most:

- Less anxiety around "performing"
- More meaningful contributions
- Safety for authentic thinking



## Tools & Practices:

- Share agendas/questions in advance
- Build pauses into discussions
- Use written input tools like Jamboard, shared docs, Slack threads

## Try This:

Send the agenda 24 hours in advance and add a one-minute silent pause for reflection mid-meeting.



## Consent to Contribute (vs. Cold Calling)

### Assumption:

Calling on people shows you value their input.

### Reality:

Cold-calling can feel threatening or unsafe, especially for people who've been historically silenced.

### What changes when this becomes the norm:

Participation rises when safety replaces pressure and trust builds over time.



### Benefits for those who need it most:

- Reduced stress
- Greater willingness to share

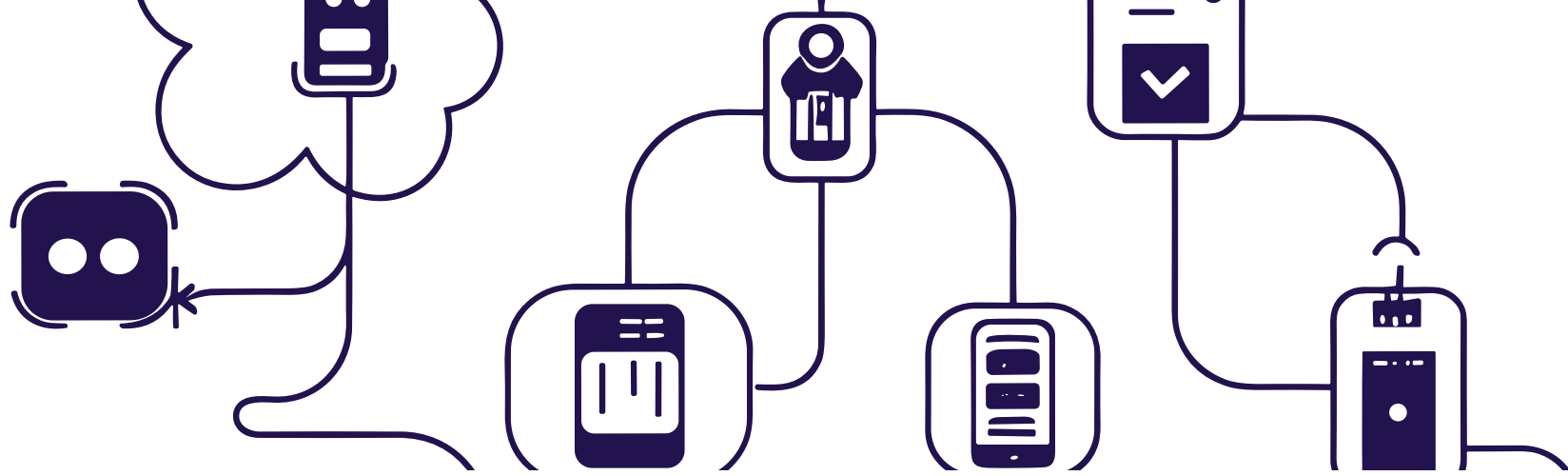


### Tools & Practices

- Ask for volunteers first
- Invite asynchronous responses
- Check in privately before expecting public contributions

### Try This:

Replace "let's hear from you" with "who'd like to share?" and leave space for silence.



## Communication Styles and Channels

### Assumption:

Speaking up in meetings is the main way to show engagement.

### Reality:

Not everyone communicates best verbally or in real time. Some people shine through writing, visual thinking, or asynchronous contributions.

### **i** What changes when this becomes the norm:

Richer, more diverse input across your team. Better documentation too.



### Benefits for those who need it most:

- Reduced communication anxiety
- Ability to shine in their medium of choice

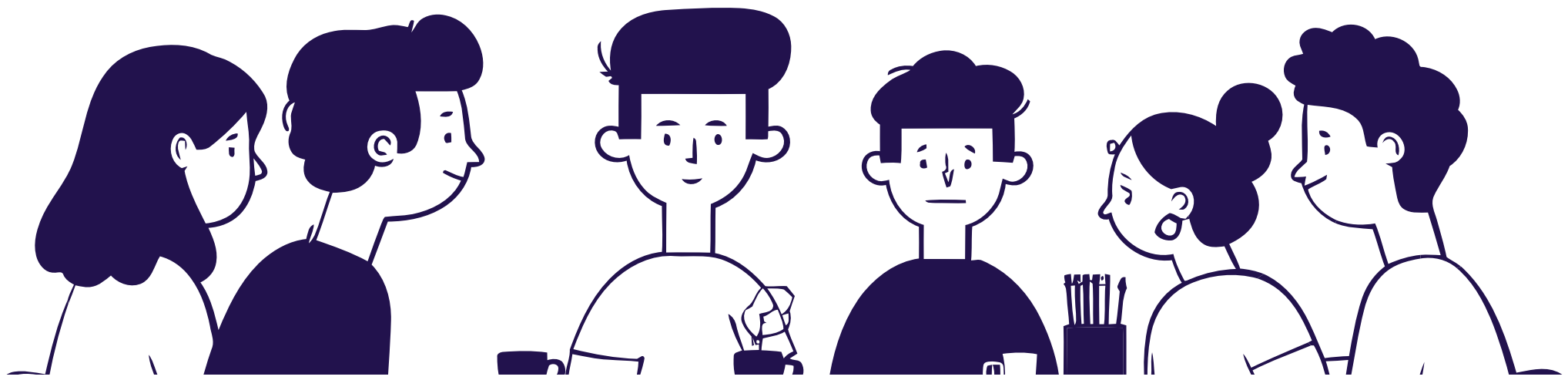


### Tools & Practices

- Welcome written, visual, or asynchronous contributions
- Normalize different modes of engagement

### Try This:

Offer "respond in chat or later in writing" as an equal option to speaking up live.



## Eye Contact and Body Language

### Assumption:

Engaged people make eye contact and sit still.

### Reality:

For many neurodivergent folks, eye contact is **uncomfortable** or even painful. Movement (like stimming or fidgeting) can help focus and regulate their nervous system.

### **i** What changes when this becomes the norm:

More relaxed and human meetings and less judgement about what "professionalism" looks like.



### Benefits for those who need it most:

- Freedom to self-regulate without stigma
- Reduced masking and fatigue
- Increased capacity to stay present

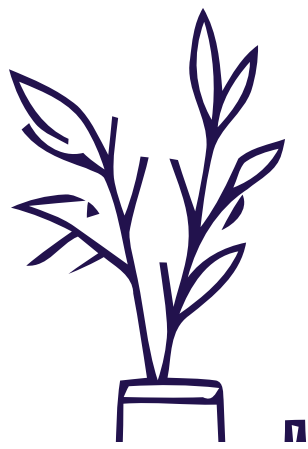


### Tools & Practices:

- Avoid commenting on body language
- Normalize movement-friendly meetings
- Try walking 1:1's, standing meetings, or sensory friendly setups.

### Try This:

Begin by saying, "move however you need, stretch, pace, fidget, it's all welcome here!"



# Pronouns and Identity Respect

## Assumption:

**Names make pronouns obvious.**

## Reality:

**Assuming someone's gender can cause harm.** Sharing and respecting pronouns builds trust and signals psychological safety.

## What changes when this becomes the norm:

Everyone knows that identity and safety are respected. It's not left to trans or nonbinary people to do all the work.



## Benefits for those who need it most:

- Less misgendering and emotional labour
- Clear message that they're welcome
- Less fear around participation

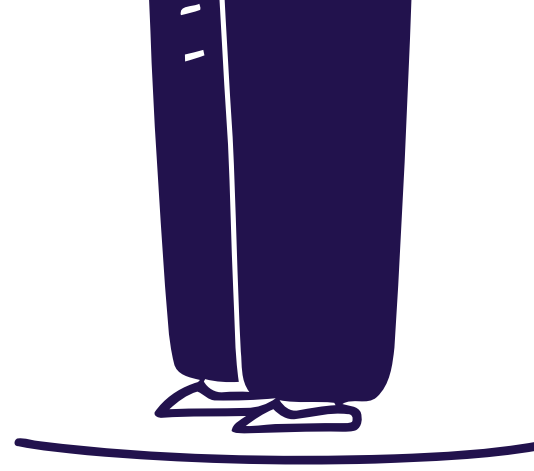


## Tools & Practices:

- Share your pronouns in intros and signatures
- Correct misgendering quickly and without drama
- Tools: Gender-Inclusive Language Guides (like from GLAAD, Stonewall, or GLSEN)

## Try This:

**Model by sharing your pronouns first without forcing others to share.**



## Expectations and Psychological Safety

### Assumption:

People should "just know" how to behave or what's appropriate.

### Reality:

**Unspoken norms are often exclusionary.** Being explicit about expectations helps everyone - especially those newer to the culture or working in a second language.

### What changes when this becomes the norm:

Clarity, consistency, and accountability rise. People feel free to be themselves.



### Benefits for those who need it most:

- Less second-guessing
- Fewer microgressions left unchallenged
- Safer space to raise concerns

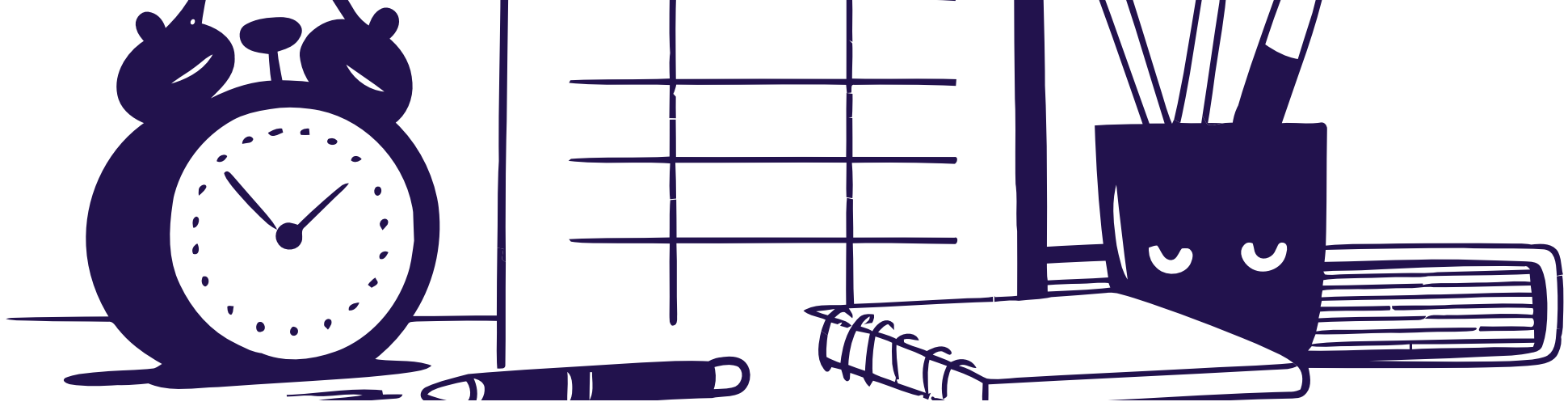


### Tools & Practices

- Start meetings with values or agreements
- Encourage calling in, not just calling out
- Use team charters or psychological safety check-ins

### Try This:

Begin meetings with "one agreement for today: listen with curiosity".



## Time and Energy Management

### Assumption:

If a meeting is productive, people should be able to **power through** without breaks - especially if it's under 90 minutes.

### Reality:

People's energy, focus, and accessibility needs vary. For neurodivergent folks, people with chronic illness or mental health challenges, carers, or those fasting or menstruating, **long uninterrupted meetings are physically and cognitively draining.**

### What changes when this becomes the norm:

Meetings become more sustainable, humane, and productive. Engagement lasts longer.



### Benefits for those who need it most:

- Ability to self-regulate energy
- Less need for masking or pushing through discomfort
- Reduced meeting fatigue, fewer sick days



### Tools & Practices:

- For meetings over 45 minutes, schedule a 5–10 minute break
- Normalize stepping away without explanation
- Timeboxing with tools like Pomodoro, or apps like Time Timer
- Consider time zones and caregiving needs

### Try This:

Set a timer for a five-minute stretch break every 45-60 minutes.



## Language and Communication Clarity

### Assumption:

**Everyone understands the acronyms, idioms, and shorthand used in meetings.** If they don't, they'll speak up and ask.

### Reality:

Not everyone feels safe or empowered to say "I don't understand." **Language norms often reflect dominant cultural, educational, or neurotypical communication styles - and they can unintentionally exclude others.**

### What changes when this becomes the norm:

Meetings become clearer and more welcoming. Fewer people fake understanding or zone out. More people engage confidently.



### Benefits for those who need it most:

- Reduced anxiety and cognitive load
- More inclusive of non-native speakers, neurodivergent people, and those new to the org or industry
- Stronger sense of psychological safety and clarity



### Tools & Practices:

- Avoid unexplained acronyms or insider references
- Provide quick definitions or glossary in shared docs
- Encourage a "no stupid questions" norm
- Use real-time captioning tools ( Otter.ai or Zoom Live Transcript)

### Try This:

**Add a glossary slide or doc link for recurring meetings.**



## The Future We're Building

This guide isn't about patching broken meetings. It's about reimagining them. Too often, boardrooms and Zoom calls force people to mask, shrink, or stay silent. We believe what benefits the most marginalized benefits everyone.

If you knew better, you'd do better. Now you know. So try one shift in your next meeting. Share what changes. Together, let's design spaces where everyone can belong without compromise.

♥ **We Are Misfits**

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# Resources

1

Gender-Inclusive Language Guides: [GLAAD](#), [Stonewall](#), [GLSEN](#)

2

Plain Language & Accessibility: [Plain language guide](#), [Accessibility-first writing guide](#)

3

Real time captioning and transcription: [Otter.ai](#), [Zoom Live Transcript](#)

4

Time management tools: [Time Timer](#), [Pomodoro technique](#)

5

Team and safety practices: [Team charters](#) / [Psychological safety check-ins](#)

