



Build a Life Where You Can Feel Safe:

A handbook for neurodivergent
and/or LGBTQ+ adults

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About this handbook

This handbook is for neurodivergent and/or LGBTQ+ adults who want practical, affirming ways to understand safety, plan ahead, protect their dignity, and find support.

It brings together information about intersectionality, trauma, rights, public spaces, safety planning, support networks, and scripts you can use when things feel difficult.

It is written with the belief that safety is not just about avoiding danger.

Safety can also mean being respected, being able to communicate your needs, having choices, knowing who to contact, and having tools that help your body and brain feel more settled.

How to use this handbook

This handbook is designed to be written in, drawn on, adapted, skipped through, and returned to when needed. You do not have to complete it in order. You can use words, symbols, colours, lists, diagrams, stickers, screenshots, or anything else that helps you think and communicate.

- Use the reflection spaces to notice what feels true for you.
- Use the drawing spaces for maps, symbols, body outlines, safety routes, sensory plans, or visual reminders.
- Use the writing spaces to plan ahead, record experiences, or create scripts in your own words.
- Leave anything blank if it does not feel useful. Blank space is allowed.

My intention for using this handbook:

Things I want this handbook to help me with:

1. Understanding intersectionality

Intersectionality is a way of understanding that people have many identities at the same time, and these identities combine to shape how the world treats us. Being trans, autistic, disabled, Black, working class, queer, older, younger, a migrant, or a survivor of trauma can all affect what safety looks like.

Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality to explain that discrimination is often treated as if it happens in one category at a time, but real life does not work like that. A person's experiences are shaped by the way different identities overlap and interact.

- Two autistic people may have very different experiences depending on race, gender, class, sexuality, disability, religion, or immigration status.
- A white gay man and a Black trans woman may both be LGBTQ+, but they may face different risks and barriers.
- A non-binary autistic person may experience ableism, transphobia, sexism, and misunderstanding at the same time.
- Support that works for one person may not work for everyone.

Remember: intersectionality is not about ranking identities or deciding who “has it worst.” It is about seeing people fully, including you. Your experiences are real, valid, and shaped by more than one part of who you are.

Reflection space: seeing myself fully

Parts of who I am that matter to my safety:

Places where I feel seen, respected, or understood

Drawing space. Create a symbol, map, or image of what “being fully seen” means to you.

2. What safety can mean

Safety is personal. For some people, safety means being physically protected. For others, it means being believed, not being forced to mask, having sensory needs respected, using the right name and pronouns, having access to toilets or changing spaces, or knowing how to leave a situation quickly.

- Physical safety: being free from violence, threats, harassment, or being trapped.
- Emotional safety: being listened to, believed, and treated with care.
- Sensory safety: having control over noise, light, touch, crowds, smells, and movement where possible.
- Identity safety: being respected as who you are, including your name, pronouns, sexuality, gender, disability, neurotype, culture, and body.
- Practical safety: having transport, money, medication, food, phone charge, documents, and contacts when you need them.

A useful question is: What helps me have more choice, more control, and more support in this situation?

Reflection space: my personal meaning of safety

Safety feels like:

Safety does not feel like:

Three things that help me have more choice or control:

1.

2.

3.

3. Trauma and why safety can feel difficult

Trauma can make it harder for the brain to recognise safety and harder for the body to feel safe. This is not a personal failure. It is an adaptation. If your body has had to protect you for a long time, it may stay alert even when you are not currently in danger.

Research on trauma describes changes in systems linked to threat detection, memory, stress, and regulation. The brain's alarm system may become more reactive, while the parts that help judge context and calm the alarm may have to work harder. This can make safe situations feel uncertain or unsafe.

In simple terms: trauma can teach the brain to expect danger. When danger has been familiar, safety may need to be relearned slowly, with support, repetition, and kindness.

Signs your nervous system may be in survival mode

- Feeling on edge, restless, or unable to relax.
- Wanting to leave, hide, shut down, or avoid people.
- Finding it hard to speak, think, decide, or process information.
- Feeling numb, detached, frozen, or very tired.
- Feeling angry, panicked, overwhelmed, or tearful.
- Needing more stimming, movement, quiet, pressure, routine, or predictability.

If this happens, try to reduce demands rather than judge yourself.

Safety can begin with one small choice: move away, lower noise, message someone, drink water, eat something familiar, use a grounding object, or sit somewhere with an exit visible.

Body and brain check-in

When I am moving towards survival mode, I notice:

In my body:

In my thoughts:

In my behaviour:

Drawing space. Mark, sketch, or colour where stress or safety shows up in your body.

One small thing I can try when I notice these signs:

4. Know your rights in toilets and single-sex spaces

UK equality law and guidance in this area is changing and contested.

The Equality Act 2010 protects people from discrimination, harassment, and victimisation, including protection linked to disability, sexual orientation, sex, and gender reassignment.

Recent UK guidance and legal decisions have affected how some organisations approach single-sex services. If you need legal advice, contact a qualified adviser, ACAS, a union, a legal centre, or an LGBTQ+ legal support organisation.

Practical safety principles

- You do not have to disclose personal medical information to a member of the public.
- You do not have to explain your body, history, diagnosis, transition, sexuality, or trauma.
- If a situation feels unsafe, leaving is allowed. You do not have to stay to prove a point.
- If you are challenged, prioritise getting to a safer place, contacting support, and recording what happened when you can.
- If you are refused access, harassed, or threatened, you may be able to make a complaint, report a hate incident, or seek specialist advice.

If someone challenges you

You do not need to prove anything to someone who is harassing or intimidating you. If it feels safe to speak, keep it short.

- “I am using the facility I need.”
- “I am not discussing personal information.”
- “Please speak to staff if you have a concern.”
- “I am leaving now.”

Lowering the chance of problems

1. Check before you go: if possible, look up venue facilities, access information, or policies.
2. Go with someone you trust: an ally can wait nearby, help you leave, or speak to staff.
3. Choose the safest usable option: this may be a gender-neutral toilet, accessible toilet, quiet facility, or a space where staff are nearby.
4. Plan your exit: know where the door, reception, security desk, or bus stop is.
5. Record details afterwards: date, time, location, what happened, names, descriptions, witnesses, and any messages or photos.

Planning space: using public facilities

Before I go, I can check:

If I need to leave quickly, my exit plan is:

A short phrase I might use:

5. If something goes wrong

If you are refused access you can:

- Move to a safer place first.
- Write down what happened as soon as you can.
- Ask for the organisation's complaints process.
- Contact an LGBTQ+ support organisation, disability organisation, union, ACAS, Citizens Advice, or a legal adviser if needed.
- If there was abuse, violence, intimidation, outing, or threats, consider reporting it as a hate incident or hate crime if that feels right for you.

Incident notes

Date, time, place:

What happened:

Who was involved or witnessed it:

What I need next:

If you are harassed

Harassment can include verbal abuse, intimidation, unwanted questioning, threats, outing, filming, blocking your way, damaging belongings, or repeated behaviour that makes you feel unsafe. You deserve support whether or not you decide to report.

- Tell staff or a trusted person if it is safe.
- Move away from the person or group.
- Call 999 if there is immediate danger.
- Keep screenshots, messages, photos, or notes if you can do so safely.
- Contact a specialist organisation such as [Galop](#) for support with anti-LGBTQ+ abuse, hate crime, domestic abuse, or sexual violence.

6. Safety at work, volunteering, education, or services

Employers, education providers, charities, health services, and public services should take reasonable steps to prevent discrimination, harassment, and victimisation.

Neurodivergent people may also be entitled to reasonable adjustments if they are disabled under the Equality Act 2010. The law focuses on the impact of a condition, not only whether someone has a formal diagnosis.

Possible reasonable adjustments

- Clear written instructions and expectations.
- Advance notice of changes, meetings, or sensory demands.
- Flexible working, breaks, quiet space, or remote options where possible.
- Communication preferences, such as email instead of phone calls.
- Permission to use regulation tools such as headphones, fidgets, scripts, or movement breaks.
- A named contact person for concerns.
- Support with toilets, changing spaces, uniforms, names, pronouns, and confidentiality.

If there is a problem you can:

- Write down what happened and how it affected you.
- Ask for adjustments in writing if that feels manageable.
- Speak to HR, a manager, a tutor, a support worker, a union, or an advocate.
- Use the complaints, grievance, safeguarding, or dignity at work process.
- Contact ACAS, Citizens Advice, a union, or a specialist legal service for guidance.

Adjustment request planner

What is difficult or unsafe at the moment?

What adjustment or support would help?

Who do I need to contact?

Words I could use in an email or conversation:

7. Build your personal safety plan

A safety plan is a practical document that helps you know what to do before, during, and after stressful or unsafe situations. It can be simple, visual, written, recorded as a voice note, or shared with trusted people.

My early warning signs might be:

- Body signs: racing heart, nausea, pain, shaking, shutdown, restlessness, fatigue.
- Thinking signs: confusion, looping thoughts, mistrust, panic, blankness, difficulty deciding.
- Behaviour signs: masking more, speaking less, needing to escape, people-pleasing, irritability, freezing.

My first steps when I feel unsafe can be:

1. Pause and lower demands if possible.
2. Move to a quieter, brighter, darker, more open, or more private place, depending on what helps.
3. Use a grounding tool: cold water, weighted item, fidget, music, breathing, pressure, movement, or safe smell.
4. Message a trusted person using a short agreed phrase or emoji.
5. Leave the situation if staying increases risk.

My quick safety plan

When I notice:	I can try:
If that does not help:	I will contact:

A phrase, emoji, or symbol that means “I need help” :

My safety network

A safety network is not just a list of people you know. It is a list of people, services, places, or organisations whose behaviour shows that they are likely to support your safety, choices, privacy, and dignity.

You do not have to trust someone just because they are family, a friend, a partner, a colleague, a professional, or someone with authority. Trust is not something another person is entitled to because of their role. Trust is a judgement you are allowed to make based on what they actually do, how they treat you, and whether their behaviour helps you feel safer over time.

It can be helpful to ask: Does this person respect my boundaries, believe me, protect my privacy, and support my choices? If the answer is no, mixed, or uncertain, you can choose a smaller role for them in your safety plan, or leave them out completely.

Examples of safer behaviour

- They listen without mocking, minimising, or rushing you.
- They use your correct name and pronouns, and they respect how you describe yourself.
- They believe you when you say something feels unsafe, even if they do not fully understand it.
- They keep private information private unless you have asked them to share it, or there is an immediate serious safety concern.
- They ask what would help instead of taking over.
- They respect “no”, “not now”, “I need space”, and “I do not want to talk about this.”
- They support your access needs, sensory needs, communication needs, and boundaries.
- They help you leave unsafe situations without shaming you for leaving.
- They are willing to apologise, repair harm, and change their behaviour.
- Their support feels steady enough that you can be more yourself around them.

Examples of unsafe behaviour

- They dismiss, laugh at, question, or minimise your experiences.
- They pressure you to disclose information about your body, diagnosis, sexuality, gender, trauma, medication, or personal history.
- They out you, share your private information, or talk about you without consent.
- They ignore your boundaries or treat boundaries as rude, dramatic, selfish, or unreasonable.
- They use your access needs, neurodivergence, disability, sexuality, gender, or trauma against you.
- They make support conditional on you masking, being “easy”, hiding parts of yourself, or agreeing with them.
- They make you feel guilty for needing help, needing space, or leaving an unsafe situation.

- They say they know what is best for you but do not listen to what you say you need.
- They are kind in public but controlling, mocking, threatening, or dismissive in private.
- You feel smaller, more confused, more afraid, or less able to say no after interacting with them.

Safety planning tip: people can have different roles. Someone might be safe to ask for a lift but not safe to tell personal information. Someone might be supportive in a crisis but not good with sensory needs. You are allowed to be specific about what each person can and cannot help with.

Use the table below to list people, services, or places that have shown safer behaviour. You can also add notes about what not to ask them for, if that helps you make clearer choices under stress.

Name / service	How they can help	Contact details	Best time / method
Trusted person 1:			
Trusted person 2:			
Professional support:			
Emergency contact:			

8. What I can control, influence, and let go of

Purpose: building clarity, reducing overwhelm, and choosing where to put your energy.

When life feels chaotic or pressured, it can be grounding to sort the different parts of your situation into three groups:

1. What I can control
2. What I can influence
3. What is outside my control

This helps you focus your energy where it will make a difference, rather than getting stuck in worry, guilt, or self-blame.

Things I can control

These are the choices, actions, and boundaries that belong fully to you. They are the areas where change is most possible and where small steps can have a big impact.

Examples include:

- How I plan ahead.
- The boundaries I set.
- What I say yes or no to.
- Whether I stay in or leave a conversation.
- How and when I respond to messages.
- What media I consume.
- What I carry with me to feel safe.
- Asking for help or accommodations.
- How I advocate for myself.
- The sensory supports I use.

These are the places where you have the most power to create change.

Things I can influence

These are areas where you do not have full control, but your actions, communication, or choices can shape the outcome.

Examples include:

- Relationships and communication.
- Negotiating needs with others.
- Group dynamics.
- Community support.
- Advocacy efforts.

Influence does not guarantee a particular outcome, but it means your voice, choices, and boundaries matter.

Things outside my control

These are the things you cannot change, no matter how hard you try. Recognising them can reduce pressure, guilt, and self-blame.

Examples include:

- Other people's emotions or reactions.
- Sudden changes.
- Past events.
- Discrimination.
- Systems and institutions.
- Politics.
- The wider economy.

Letting go of responsibility for these areas can free up energy for the things you *can* shape.

Turning insight into action

Goal: setting realistic goals for change.

Once you have mapped out what you can control, influence, and let go of, the next step is to choose small, doable actions that support your wellbeing and safety.

Use the structure below to help you plan changes that feel manageable and grounded.

A. What I can do right now

Small actions you can take immediately — usually things fully within your control.

Examples:

- Take a break or pause a conversation.
- Use a sensory support.
- Say no to something that feels too much.
- Reach out to someone safe.
- Adjust your environment.

My “right now” actions:

-
-
-

B. What I can do in the next 24 hours

Short-term steps that require a little planning or intention.

Examples:

- Send an email asking for accommodations.
- Plan a supportive routine for tomorrow.

- Choose what media to avoid or engage with.
- Prepare items that help you feel safe.

My 24-hour actions:

-
-
-

C. What I can do in the next week

Slightly bigger steps that build momentum and support longer-term change.

Examples:

- Have a conversation about boundaries.
- Arrange a meeting with someone who can help.
- Start an advocacy or support process.
- Make a plan for a situation you are worried about.

My one week actions:

-
-
-

Bringing it all together

This exercise is about shifting from overwhelm to clarity. You do not have to change everything — just identify what is yours to carry, what you can gently influence, and what you can release.

From there, small steps taken consistently can create meaningful change.

Reflection space: what I am carrying

Something I can take responsibility for:

Something I can influence gently:

Something I can practice releasing:

Drawing space. Draw three circles for control, influence, release.

9. Create a safety box

A safety box is a physical or digital collection of things that help you feel steadier, more connected, or more prepared. It can be a box, bag, phone folder, notebook, wallet card, or shared document.

Support and contact information

- A safety network sheet.
- Photos or names of trusted people and their phone numbers.
- Contact details for professionals who may be able to help.
- Information about support services such as [Galop](#), [Switchboard](#), [Mindline Trans+](#), [LGBT Foundation](#), local [Mind](#), or local community groups.
- A list of community groups that welcome LGBTQ+ and/or neurodivergent adults.

Planning and communication

- Scenario cards for situations you find difficult.
- A picture, emoji, or symbol agreed with friends to mean “I need help.”
- A card that explains your communication needs.
- A short list of what helps and what makes things worse.

Food, medication, and body needs

- A safe foods list.
- Long-life safe foods or snacks.
- Water or electrolyte sachets.
- Medication or crisis medication, if prescribed and safe to store.
- Menstrual, continence, sensory, or gender-affirming care items.

Comfort and regulation

- Fidgets or regulation tools.
- Ear defenders, headphones, earplugs, or sunglasses.
- A blanket, scarf, hoodie, or weighted item.
- Comforting smells, textures, or objects.
- Pictures of people, pets, places, memories, or communities that help you feel connected.

Safe places

- A list or map of places that feel safer to you.
- Venues with gender-neutral toilets, quiet areas, accessible exits, or kind staff.
- Places where you can charge your phone, sit down, get water, or wait for help.

My safety box checklist

Items, information, or reminders I want to include:

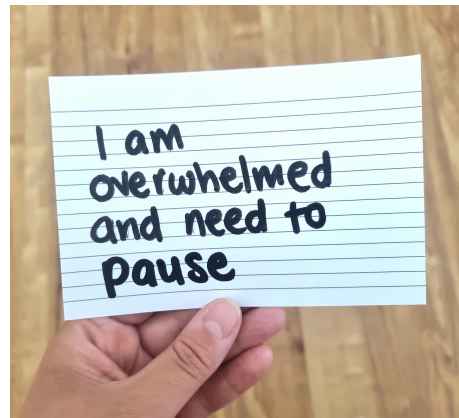
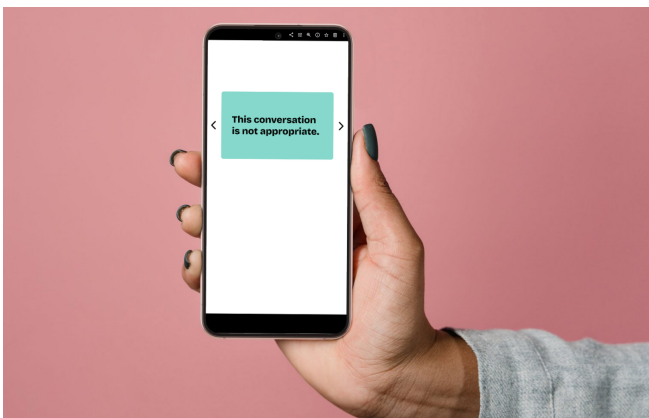
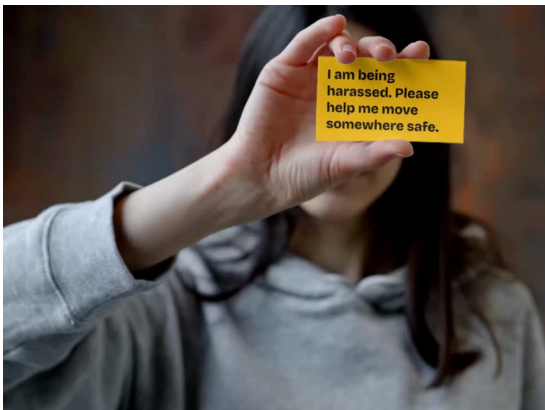
- ☐ Contact details
- ☐ Safe food or drink
- ☐ Medication or medical information
- ☐ Sensory supports
- ☐ Comfort objects
- ☐ Scripts or communication cards
- ☐ Photos, images, or grounding reminders
- ☐ Other:

Drawing space. Design or map my safety box, bag, phone folder, or wallet card.

A large, empty light blue rectangular area intended for drawing or mapping. It occupies the majority of the page below the header text.

10. Script cards

Script cards can reduce the pressure to think of words when you are stressed, overloaded, or unsafe. You can print these, save them on your phone, or adapt them into your own language.



When I need space

- “I need a quiet space now.”
- “I am overwhelmed and need to pause.”
- “Please give me a moment to process.”
- “I can continue this by message or email.”

When someone questions my identity

- “That is private.”

- “Please use my name and pronouns.”
- “I am not discussing my body or medical history.”
- “This conversation is not appropriate.”

When I need help from staff

- “I am being harassed. Please help me move somewhere safe.”
- “I need to speak to a manager privately.”
- “Please do not share personal information about me.”
- “I need written information about your complaints process.”

When I need to leave

- “I am leaving now.”
- “I do not feel safe continuing this conversation.”
- “Please do not follow me.”
- “I am going to contact someone for support.”

My own script cards

Situation:	Words I can use:

11. Support organisations

The organisations below may be useful for LGBTQ+ and/or neurodivergent adults in the UK. Contact details can change, so check the organisation's own website before relying on them in an urgent situation.

Organisation	Who they support	Type of support	Phone / contact
National Autistic Society	Autistic adults and families	Advice, guidance, community support and service directory	020 7833 2299
ADHD UK	Adults and families affected by ADHD	Information, advocacy, resources and community support	020 3984 9679; hello@adhduk.co.uk
Dyspraxia Foundation	Adults with dyspraxia/DCD, families and carers	Helpline, information, advice and awareness	01462 454986; info@dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk
British Dyslexia Association	Dyslexic adults, families, carers and professionals	Information, helpline, advice, training and signposting	0333 405 4555; helpline@bdadyslexia.org.uk
LGBT Foundation	LGBTQ+ adults	Helpline, email support, wellbeing support, advice and signposting	0345 330 3030; helpline@lgbt.foundation
Switchboard	LGBTQIA+ people, friends, family and allies	Confidential listening support, information and signposting	0800 0119 100; hello@switchboard.lgbt

<u>Galop</u>	LGBT+ people affected by abuse or violence	National helpline, practical and emotional support, referrals and advocacy	0800 999 5428; help@galop.org.uk
<u>Stonewall</u>	LGBTQ+ people and allies	Information, guidance, campaigning and signposting	020 7593 1850; info@stonewall.org.uk
<u>akt</u>	LGBTQ+ young adults aged 16–25 facing homelessness or hostile environments	Housing support, crisis support, advocacy, mentoring and referrals	020 7831 6562; contact@akt.org.uk; gethelp@akt.org.uk
<u>Mindline Trans+</u>	Trans, non-binary and gender-diverse people, plus family and friends	Emotional support helpline and signposting	0300 330 5468; mindline@mindinsomerset.org.uk

12. Emergency and crisis reminders

- If you or someone else is in immediate danger, call 999.
- If you need urgent medical help but it is not life-threatening, use NHS 111.
- If you need to talk to someone urgently, Samaritans are available on 116 123.
- If you are experiencing LGBTQ+ abuse, violence, domestic abuse, sexual violence, or hate crime, Galop may be able to support you.
- If you are trans, non-binary, or gender-diverse and need emotional support, Mindline Trans+ may be useful.

13. Final reminder

You deserve safety, dignity, privacy, access, and support. You do not have to make yourself smaller to be worthy of care. Your needs are real. Your identity is valid. Safety can be built slowly, with the right people, the right information, and practical tools that work for your body, brain, and life.

My closing reflection

One thing I want to remember from this handbook:

One kind thing I can say to myself:

One next step that feels possible:

Drawing space. Create an image, symbol, or reminder of safety, dignity or, support