There’s a particular work pattern I recognise in myself and in a lot of other neurodivergent people.

You get given a task. You go away and think about it carefully. You plan what needs to happen. You spend time doing good, detailed work. Then you come back when it’s done.

From the inside, this feels respectful: you’re not bothering anyone, you’re getting on with it, you’ll show them something solid when there’s something worth showing.

From the outside, though, it can look like… silence. Colleagues and managers don’t know what’s happening. They can’t see the thinking, only the gap. Some worry you’ve forgotten. Some start chasing. Some assume you’ve hit a problem and not told anyone. It’s not always a fair assumption, but it is a common one.

This article is about that “go quiet and deliver” pattern – why so many autistic and ADHD people fall into it, how it can cause friction, and what tiny, realistic changes might make communication easier without forcing you to become someone who lives in email.

I’ll use my own experience throughout: I’m an autistic adult who works full time, studies part time, has a family and volunteers with Beaver Scouts. My natural default is to focus deeply on a task and report back when there’s a concrete output. I’m slowly learning to build scaffolding around that tendency so other people aren’t left guessing.

# Quick Summary

- Many neurodivergent people naturally “go quiet and deliver”: we focus on doing the work and only update when there’s something concrete to show.
- Colleagues often read this silence as worry (“Has it been forgotten?”), which can lead to chasing, micro-managing or misunderstandings.
- This pattern isn’t laziness or avoidance; it usually comes from deep-focus strengths, past criticism, and genuine difficulty tracking multiple communication threads.
- Small, repeatable habits – agreeing check-in points, setting reminders, sending very short progress emails – can keep people in the loop without constant social effort.
- You don’t have to become chatty or performative. The goal is a communication style that is sustainable for your brain *and* gives others enough information to trust your process.

# What “go quiet and deliver” looks like from the

# inside

For me, the steps often go like this:

1. I’m given a task – a report, an analysis, a piece of writing, some planning.
2. My brain switches into problem-solving mode. I think about what’s needed, plan it out (often in bullet points first), and start working.
3. Once I’m in that mode, my attention is on doing the task, not narrating it.
4. I intend to send an update at some sensible point, but I’m waiting until I have “enough” to say.
5. By the time I feel ready to update, quite a bit of time has passed. Sometimes people have already started checking in to see where things are.

Internally, this feels efficient. Why send three half-baked updates when you could send one solid piece of work?

Externally, it can look like:

- long stretches of silence
- apparently slow progress (even if a lot is happening in your head or in drafts)
- a slightly mysterious “ta-da!” moment where a finished thing suddenly appears

If you have a brain that likes deep focus and hates context-switching, “go quiet and deliver” makes complete sense. But most modern workplaces are built around continuous communication. Other people are often more comfortable seeing “small, visible steps” than “one big reveal”.

# Why so many neurodivergent people work this way

There are good reasons this pattern is common.

## Deep-focus strengths

Plenty of autistic and ADHD people do their best work in long, uninterrupted blocks. Once we’re in that mode, breaking off to send an update or sit in a meeting can feel like being yanked out of a carefully constructed thought structure.

If you’ve spent years being valued for detailed, accurate work, it makes sense that your

brain prioritises the work itself over surface-level reassurance.

## Limited communication spoons

Each email, message or “quick chat” isn’t just a few words. It can involve:

- deciding what to say
- worrying about tone
- predicting how it might be read
- managing your own anxiety about bothering people

When your spoons are already low from masking, sensory load and task-switching, it’s natural to save them for the work itself.

## Past criticism and perfectionism

Many neurodivergent people have a history of being criticised for “doing it wrong”, “overthinking”, or “missing the point”. That can make it scary to show work in progress. It may feel safer to wait until something is as polished as you can make it.

If you’ve been told off in the past for asking too many questions or “going into too much detail”, you might also have learned that silence is safer than being visible.

## Executive function and working memory

Keeping track of both the task and the meta-layer (“remember to update X”, “mention Y to Z”, “reply to that email”) uses working memory and executive function. When those are already stretched, the meta-layer can easily fall off the edge.

None of this means you’re incapable of communicating. It means you’re doing that communication on top of a brain that is already working very hard.

# How “go quiet and deliver” can look from the outside

It can help to gently flip perspective and imagine what your pattern looks like to others.

If you’re a manager and you delegate a task, then hear nothing for a week, you have to make assumptions. Those might be:

- “They’ve forgotten.”
- “They’re stuck and don’t want to admit it.”
- “They’ve decided it’s not important.”
- “They’re overwhelmed and I should be worried.”
- “Are they even working? What are they doing all day?”

You might respond by:

- sending reminder emails
- asking for more updates next time
- feeling you can’t fully trust that person with future tasks

They may not be fair assumptions. But if they don’t know how your brain works, they are understandable ones.

When I wrote a neurodiversity statement for work, one of the things I named explicitly was this habit of not “touching base” often enough. My default was to focus on delivering the task and to report back when there was a concrete output. Seeing that written down helped me and my colleagues understand that this wasn’t disinterest; it was a trait.

Once people see it as a trait, they can start to work with you rather than against you.

## Why you don’t have to become a different person

At this point, you might be fearing that the only solution is to become someone who loves constant meetings, group chats and “quick check-ins”.

That is not the goal.

The goal is:

- enough communication that people know you’re engaged and making progress
- *without* destroying your capacity to actually do the work

You can think of it as building a thin bridge between your natural working style and the information other people reasonably need.

The rest of this article is about very small, specific things that might help build that bridge.

# Tiny communication habits that help (without constant talking)

## 1. Agree check-in points at the start

When you’re given a task, instead of silently accepting it and disappearing, you might say:

- “This looks clear. Would it be helpful if I send you a quick update in a week?”
- “When would you like to see a first version?”
- “What are the key decision points before the final deadline?”

This does a few things:

- reassures the other person there will be visibility
- gives you concrete dates to aim for, not just one big deadline
- reduces guessing about when they’ll start to worry

You can even agree the *format* of the check-in:

- “A short email?”
- “A couple of bullet points?”
- “5 minutes at the end of next week’s meeting?”

Once it’s agreed, you can put those dates in your calendar with reminders, so you’re not relying on memory.

## 2. Use very short progress emails

You don’t need to write essays every time you update someone. In fact, they’ll often prefer you don’t.

A simple pattern I’m working with is:

> Subject: [Project] – quick update
>
> Body:

> - This is what I’ve done so far…
> - This is what I’m doing next…
> - This is when I expect the next milestone / finished version…

For example:

> “I’ve pulled together the initial data and drafted the first two sections of the report. Next I’m going to check X with Y and then write the recommendations. I’m aiming to send you a full draft by Thursday afternoon.”

That’s often all someone needs to relax.

If you’re afraid of over-promising, you can soften the language:

- “I’m aiming for…”
- “Barring anything unexpected…”
- “If that timeline needs adjusting, let me know.”

## 3. Set reminders that match your tendencies

If your default is to hyperfocus, you may need external prompts to look up from the work and communicate.

Some ideas:

- calendar reminders specifically labelled “Update [person] on [project] – 2 sentences”
- a recurring weekly reminder like “What is in progress? Who might need an update?”
- a short checklist on your desk:
  - “Have I told anyone what I’m doing?”
  - “Does anyone think I’ve forgotten something?”

The key is to make the reminder small and non-judgemental. It’s not there to shout at you; it’s there to tap you on the shoulder.

### 4. Reframe updates as part of the work, not an interruption

If updates feel like a distraction, it might help to quietly re-label them.

Instead of:

- “Ugh, now I have to stop working to write an email.”

Try:

- “This email is part of making the project successful. It’s one of the tasks.”

For some people, putting “Send progress email” on the task list alongside “Analyse data” makes it feel more legitimate and less like a social extra.

## Looking after yourself while you build new habits

Changing communication habits takes energy, especially if you’re also dealing with masking, burnout or low spoons.

A few thoughts to keep it gentler:

### Start small

You don’t have to overhaul everything at once. You might choose:

- one project where you experiment with agreed check-ins
- one manager you try short updates with
- one simple weekly reminder to review what’s in progress

Once those feel more familiar, you can expand slowly.

### Be honest about your traits (when it’s safe)

If you feel able, you might say something like to a trusted manager:

> “My natural tendency is to go quiet and focus on the work, then report back

> when it’s done. I know that can make it hard to see what’s happening, so I’m trying to build in more regular updates. If there’s a specific way you’d like me to do that, I’m happy to agree a pattern.”

Framing it this way shows:

- you’re aware of the issue
- you’re not making excuses
- you’re inviting collaboration rather than waiting to be told off

Not every workplace will respond well, and you know your context best. But where there is some trust, being open can reduce pressure all round.

### Notice what actually helps

As you experiment, pay attention to:

- which updates genuinely make life easier (for you and others)
- which feel like busywork or drain you more than they’re worth

You’re allowed to keep the things that help and drop the ones that don’t. This is about sustainable communication, not about winning “most improved emailer”.

## A quiet closing thought

If your default is to “go quiet and deliver”, it might feel like there’s something wrong with you every time someone asks for more updates.

From where I sit, there isn’t.

You have a brain that is very good at going deep, spotting patterns, and producing solid work. That’s a real strength. The difficulty is that most workplaces are wired for constant visible activity as proof of progress, and your natural style isn’t built to show that.

You don’t have to turn yourself into someone who loves chatting about work more than doing it. You also don’t have to accept constant anxiety from managers who can’t see what’s happening.

Somewhere in the middle is a small, personalised set of habits: a few agreed check-ins, a

couple of tiny progress emails, a handful of reminders that stop you from disappearing completely. Enough visibility for other people to trust you. Enough quiet for you to still think.

If this article gives you one phrase to try, one reminder to set, or one way to explain your pattern that feels less like an apology and more like a fact, that’s enough.

You are allowed to work with your brain, not against it.

Andrew at Quietly Neurodivergent

I’m Andrew, the person behind Quietly Neurodivergent. I’m an autistic adult who spent many years trying to pass as “fine” – holding things together at work, showing up to meetings, hitting deadlines – and then unravelling in private. I know what it feels like to look competent on the outside while running on fumes underneath.

By day I work with student data in higher education; by night (and very early mornings) I’m a part-time PhD student thinking about education, inequality and how people move through systems that were never quite built for them. I’ve also spent nearly ten years as a town councillor and I volunteer as a Beaver Scout Leader, which means I’ve had a lot of practice navigating meetings, forms, responsibilities and sensory/social overload at the same time. That mix of lived experience, community work and research shapes how I write here: practical, plain-English pieces that sit somewhere between “this is what it’s like” and “here are some things you could try”.

I’m not a clinician and I don’t offer diagnosis, therapy or miracle fixes. What I can offer are honest accounts of what has and hasn’t helped me with study, work and everyday life, alongside small, realistic tools you can adapt for yourself. If you recognise yourself in the phrase “quietly neurodivergent”, this site is for you.

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