

BUILDING A SUPPORT NETWORK



4



INTRODUCTION

The information in this booklet pertains to how neurodiverse individuals can build a support network for engaging in entrepreneurial activities. We use 'entrepreneur' as a generic term referring to an innovator, a source of new ideas, goods, services, and business/or procedures..

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

As you read this section, keep in mind the following learning objectives:

- 1. Understand what a support system for entrepreneurship entails.*
- 2. Understand how to build connections and maintain professional relationships.*



KEY TAKEAWAYS & OUTLINE

FINDING A MENTOR

p. 3-5

In order to find an appropriate mentor, you first need to understand what to look for and where to look. Go to [Finding a Mentor](#) to learn more about:

- a. What a mentor is p. 3
- b. Key criteria for a mentor p. 3
- c. Online and in-person avenues to reach mentors p. 4-5

NETWORKING TIPS

p. 6-9

Methods of successfully preparing for and navigating networking opportunities differs depending on whether it is online or in-person networking. Go to [Networking Tips](#) to learn:

- a. Tips for entering into an initial, pre-planned conversation p. 6
- b. Tips for establishing a mentor/mentee relationship p. 7
- c. Templates for cold emailing/messaging p. 8
- d. Etiquette before and during in-person networking p. 8-9

ACCELERATORS AND INCUBATORS

p. 10-11

The [Accelerators and Incubators](#) section introduces five different accelerators and incubators for neurodiverse founders to take their ideas to the next level.

- a. BlueUmbrella p. 10
- b. Spectrum Fusion p. 10
- c. ProFound Incubator p. 11
- d. Remarkable p. 11
- e. Neurodiventures p. 11

WHAT IS A MENTOR?

A mentor is someone who has many years of experience doing what you hope to do. They have also made all the necessary mistakes on the road to success, learned from them, and are willing to pass on those lessons to you to help shape some of your own business instinct.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A MENTOR?

- A clear and verifiable track record of success in the industry, company, or position you want to develop in.
- An open, approachable and patient personality.
- A schedule which allows them to chat to you on a regular basis (around once a month).
- A history of being mentored and an understanding of how valuable mentorship is to someone who is just starting out.



FINDING A MENTOR

WHERE TO FIND A MENTOR

ONLINE

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a social network that focuses on professional networking and career development. You can use LinkedIn to display your resume, search for jobs, and enhance your professional reputation by posting updates and interacting with other people. Click on these links for tips on how to create an [effective profile](#) and [network successfully](#) on LinkedIn.

Ten Thousand Coffees

This platform enables you to browse a database of professionals by skill set, industry, university, college, and company networks after you create a profile.

Micromentor

This site connects mentors with mentees, for free. You can create a profile, complete a mentor request, and contact mentors.

Aut Collab

The Autistic Collaboration Trust is a community that welcomes all individuals and groups who fully appreciate the value of neurodiversity. Aut Collab acts as a hub for mutual support, and encourages [neurodivergent individuals](#) to connect and establish [long-term collaborations](#) and projects.



Online forum or community

An online community forum is an online space where people with similar interests, experiences, or goals can congregate to ask questions, receive peer-to-peer support, and make social connections. You can find suitable forums by searching keywords relevant to you (eg. [Entrepreneurs with ADHD](#)) on websites such as Facebook, Reddit, and Quora. Remember to take all advice, comments, and offers you receive with a grain of salt as members are usually just presenting their opinions or personal experiences.

WHERE TO FIND A MENTOR

IN-PERSON

Small Business Development Center

Through the U.S. Small Business Administration, SBDCs provide businesses with specific financial and business planning advice. You can find [your local SBDC here](#).

Stanford Neurodiversity Summit

The theme of this year's Stanford Neurodiversity Summit is "Scaling Up the Neurodiversity at Work Initiative". This virtual summit is a unique conference bringing together neurodivergent individuals, employers, service agencies, educators and students, parents, and professionals from all areas of the field.

Another Planet: Autism and Neurodiversity Conference

This conference is for all who are interested in autistic perspectives on local and global issues. There is a mixture of speakers and workshops. Themes include:

- Gender, Sexuality And Equality
- Addressing Systemic Discrimination
- Autism, Global Campaigns And Leadership



Annual CUNY Neurodiversity Conference

Topics include: Universal Design for Learning, Strategies for Competitive Employment, Academic Support, Social Inclusion & Recreation, Benefits Education & Advisement, Independent Living, Transition to/from College.

Autism Professionals Conference

The annual (United Kingdom) two-day conference is a unique opportunity for professionals to discuss best practice and share learning in innovative autism practice.

Meetup, Eventbrite or Facebook Events.

Search and sign up for the events that are relevant to you based on topic, audience and accessibility.

NETWORKING TIPS



TIPS FOR ENTERING INTO AN INITIAL, PRE-PLANNED CONVERSATION

- Prepare a list of specific questions about both their experience and your own business or idea before speaking with them.
- Start by telling them about yourself so they have context around your pursuits and your problems.
- Be conscious of their time and express your gratitude towards them (if you're meeting them offline, offer to pay for the coffee, drinks, or food).
- Towards the end of the conversation, ask them if it would be okay if you two stayed in touch or if you could shoot them questions if you ever have any.

NETWORKING TIPS



TIPS FOR ESTABLISHING A MENTOR/MENTEE RELATIONSHIP

If you both kick it off after a couple meetings and they agree to keep in touch, then you can ask to establish a mentor/mentee relationship. When approaching this conversation, be clear about your expectations and the end goal by discussing:

- What specific goal the mentor is helping you work toward
- How often will you both meet and for how long
- How often will you update your mentor on your progress

TEMPLATE FOR COLD EMAILING/MESSAGING

Dear [FIRST NAME],

I came across your profile on [WHERE YOU FOUND THEM] while I was doing some research into [WHAT YOU WANT TO DO]. I really liked [WORK/PROJECT THEY DID]. I'm looking to [YOUR GOALS AND WHAT YOU'RE DOING NOW TO ACHIEVE THEM] and would love to learn more about how you [WHAT THEY'VE DONE].

If you have some time next week — even if it's for 15 minutes over a coffee, video or phone call — I would love to pick your brain.

Have a great week, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,
[YOUR NAME]

NETWORKING TIPS

*for in-person
events*

BEFORE THE EVENT

ATTIRE

Check the event for dress code, otherwise wear business casual

- Fitted and clean clothing
- Neutral colors
- Clean shoes
- Groomed hair
- Subtle jewellery

Avoid wearing:

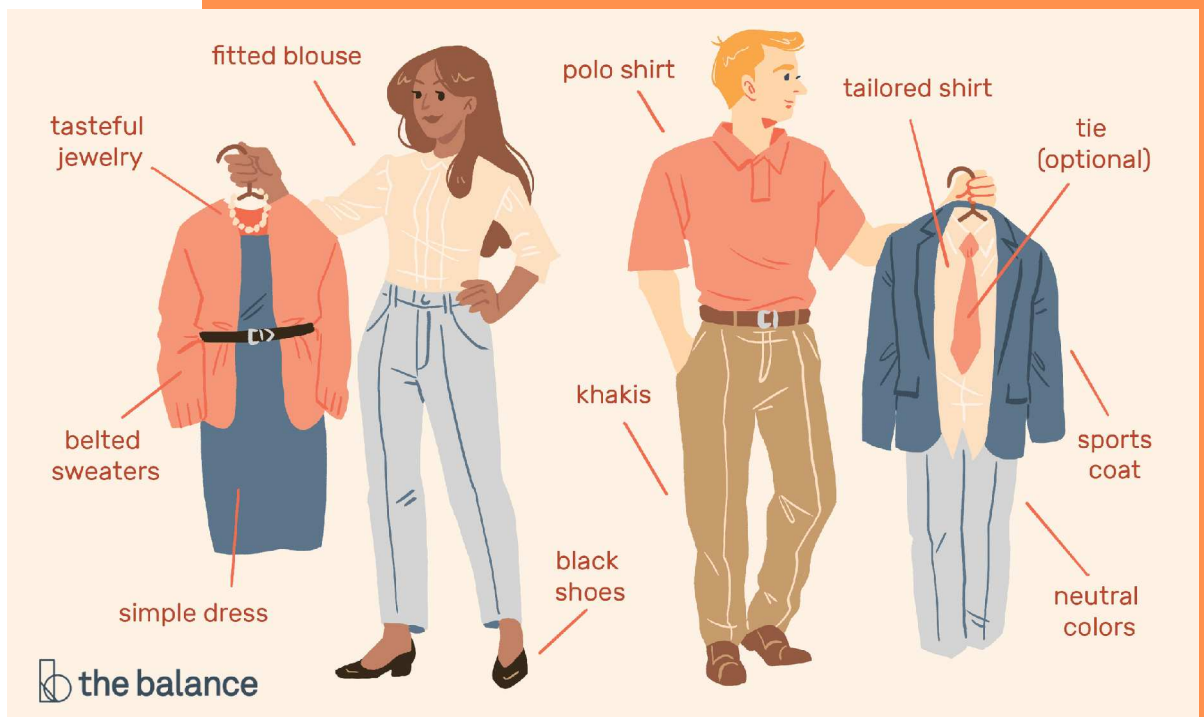
- Tight clothing
- Wrinkled and damaged clothing
- Controversial or graphic tees
- Sleeveless clothing
- Indiscreet jewellery

RESEARCH

- Research which industries, professions, and the experience level of the people who will be at the event
- Prepare some questions to ask people
- Prepare how you will introduce yourself

WHAT TO BRING:

- Notebook
- Pen
- Business cards
- Resume (if applicable or explicitly asked for)



NETWORKING TIPS

*for in-person
events*



DURING THE EVENT

- Introduce yourself with a strong handshake (2-3 seconds) and try to make eye contact, if you can
- When introducing yourself, briefly touch on your occupation, interests and intentions.
- Avoid looking at your phone.
- Try to maintain eye contact throughout the entire conversation, if you can.
- Listen more than you speak.
- Avoid referring to them with their first name unless the person gives you permission to do so.
- Ask questions about their position, projects, and interests to find some common ground. There is no need to force a conversation if you find that you both have nothing in common – simply thank them for their time, wish them an enjoyable day, and move on.
- Towards the end of the conversation, ask them if it would be okay if you two stayed in touch or if you could shoot them questions if you ever have any. Offer them your business card, and if they accept, they will usually offer you their business card too.

ACCELERATORS & INCUBATORS

BLUEUMBRELLA

BlueUmbrella accelerates startups that help people with Autism live great lives. Their support includes helping startups:

- **Connect to buyers:**

BlueUmbrella breaks the mold by driving revenue for our portfolio companies. We focus on securing paid Proof-of-Concepts (POC's) from our extensive network of partners.

- **Connect to funding**

Intense prep to get ready for customer and investor meetings. Portfolios are provided access to the BlueUmbrella Funder database covering over 500 investors who have made at least one investment in the autism space.

- **Connect to mentors**

Startups immediately get their products and pitch decks into the hands of BlueUmbrella Team. We utilize our mentors, potential customers and investors to provide feedback. Startups rapidly iterating off this feedback over and over again.

- **Access market data**

BlueUmbrella has cataloged and curated a global database of research-based startups as well as emerging companies. We have focused on companies that have the potential to have a high impact and be self-sustaining.

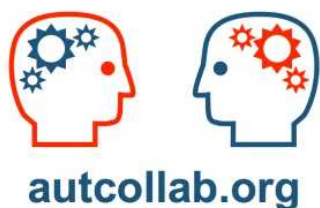


The Reactor Room improves the possibilities for adults on the autism spectrum by generating novel solutions for those who may be 'stuck' in their current situations and unable to use their skills, interests, or strengths to their full potential. We achieve this by offering experiences for these individuals to gain exposure in their areas of interests or strengths by shadowing a professional in their desired career, access to business and marketing experts for product development, employment opportunities and scaffolding for business proposals, and volunteer experiences.

ACCELERATORS & INCUBATORS



ProFound is a one-of-a-kind incubator in Perth, Western Australia, where neurodiverse individuals passionate about coding and technology, will be given a pathway towards developing a digital product, starting their journey as a technical founder and launching their own business venture.



Aut Collab (the Autistic Collaboration Trust) acts as a hub for mutual support, and catalyses the formation of long-term collaborations in the form of NeurodiVentures. NeurodiVenture is an inclusive, non-hierarchical organisation operated by neurodivergent people that provides a safe and nurturing environment for divergent thinking, creativity, exploration, and collaborative niche construction.



Remarkable is Australia's first accelerator for early-stage startups creating technology to positively impact the lives of people with disability. Their 16 week accelerator program equips early-stage startups with seed funding and the knowledge, skills and tools needed to become commercially viable businesses that have a positive social impact. Remarkable's support includes:

- Seed funding
- Access to mentor network
- Co-working space
- Masterclasses
- Disability sector expertise.