

Tips and ideas

Autistic people thrive on certainty:

- Help your employee establish a work routine.
- If something is happening to interrupt the routine, give as much warning as possible (SMS if outside of work time).
- Provide context for and agendas for meetings ahead of time.

Communication

To assist your autistic employee to thrive in the social world of work:

- Avoid euphemisms or sarcasm – say what you mean and mean what you say!
- Speak clearly and allow time for your employee to process what you have said.
- Some employees may need different forms of communication e.g. sign language or visual supports.
- Don't be offended if your employee doesn't look at you, smile or make typical "small talk".
- If your employee appears rude, don't take offense -quietly explain and give them an alternative to say next time.
- Invite to social events/gatherings but don't be offended if they say no.
- Provide information in small chunks – it helps with understanding.
- Check for understanding. Ask the employee to tell you what they understand of the communication/ instruction.

Tips and ideas

An understanding employer and supportive colleagues, who take the time to understand an autistic employee, supporting their strengths and needs will be rewarded with an outstanding employee.

As an employer ensure you:

- Clarify your expectations of the role
- Instructions should be concise and specific
- Provide patient and ongoing training and monitoring
- Create a well-structured work environment
- Regularly review performance. Any inappropriate behaviour should be addressed to ensure the individual understands what is appropriate in their respective workplace
- Provide sensitive but direct feedback
- Provide reassurance in stressful situations
- Avoid dismissive language, for example: 'not a big deal', 'don't worry about it'.

In the right role, when individualised accommodations are made, autistic employees will thrive in the workplace.



How to get the best out of your autistic employee



“ I am different.
Not less ”

Temple Grandin

Sensory sensitivities

Many individuals on the spectrum have sensory differences in how they perceive the world. If someone is oversensitive it can make it hard for them to focus or concentrate on work – in extreme cases it can cause physical pain.

Likewise, if someone is under sensitive, they may not perform at their peak because they don't react in a typical way to the environment.

Ask your employee what sensory accommodations work for them, but some common ways to adapt the environment are:

Noise: provide a quiet workspace, noise cancelling headphones or allow them to listen to music via headphones.

Smell: colleagues could be asked to avoid wearing perfumes or heavily scented deodorants. Avoid seating the employee near the kitchen area and encourage eating away from the desk.

Light: an employee may work better away from direct light sources. Fluorescent lights can be particularly difficult because they flicker and buzz. Offer the opportunity to wear sunglasses, visor or hoodies to minimise direct light.

Touch: An employee may need to wear the same type of clothes each day. Some fabrics can be difficult for an employee to manage. An employee may prefer not to be touched – always ask first.

Body movements: Some employees may be under sensitive to movement. They may move excessively or in unusual ways (e.g. hand flapping). If possible, allow the person to do this, but if it is not possible or distracting to others, try providing regular movement breaks or an alternative e.g. fidget spinner.

Possible factors influencing work effectiveness

Working Memory

Working memory is the ability to temporarily store and manage information in our minds for use in learning and comprehension. It is critical for following directions and completing complex tasks.

If an employee has difficulty with working memory, they may become overwhelmed when given too much information at once, and they may not be able to follow multi-step verbal instructions.

Executive Functioning

Executive functioning skills are the mental processes that everyone uses to plan, focus attention, self-regulate, remember instructions, think flexibly and juggle multiple tasks successfully.

Individuals with **executive dysfunction** may struggle with planning, problem-solving, staying organised, being flexible, sequencing, time management and self-regulating emotions. Some people pay attention to minor details, but have trouble seeing how these details fit into a bigger picture.

Stress and uncertainty can impact on people's executive functioning capabilities.

With education, a flexible approach and minor accommodations, the impact of these factors can be minimised.

Strategies to consider

- Providing one instruction at a time
- Giving visual instructions or an example to follow
- Minimising distractions and interruptions
- Giving clear explanations, deadlines and parameters
- Providing structured tasks, with logical and sequential steps
- Helping to break down and initiate the task
- Strategies to help with focus, eg. short breaks
- Providing clear written steps
- Providing context and bigger picture objectives of the task
- Printing to-do lists
- Providing notepads for writing notes
- Showing examples of what is needed
- Preparing checklists
- Creating diagrams
- Allowing time when transitioning between tasks
- Checking for understanding
- As the task progresses, keep checking on progress
- Giving explanations of the social expectations of your workplace.

Providing patient and ongoing explanations and training will bring significant benefits, for all staff.

“ The words WE CHOOSE
make all THE DIFFERENCE ”

Rick Ackerly

