



Individual Work Preferences Assessment (IWPA)

USER MANUAL - SHORT Version



NEURODIVERSITYHUB

Introduction

A short version of the Individual Work Preference Assessment (IWPA) was created for individuals on the autism spectrum who may have difficulties with self-reflection, have reduced verbal (expressive) communication or may require additional support from others known to them (for example parents or support persons) in order to provide responses.

The IWPA Short Version is a confidential document between a jobseeker and their employment consultant (EC). The information gathered in the IWPA and the resulting discussions can help you to prepare a separate worker profile document, to describe the individual's needs and preferences within a work environment.

The process for completing either the short or the long version of the IWPA is a means of gaining understanding of an individual and should be complimented by 'getting to know you' discussions. There is no right or wrong form to use. Rather the IWPA is a starting point for discussing an individual's needs and for the autistic individual to feel that their autism is better understood. Each further discussion may take place with the individual in the presence of a key support person (for example parent, guardian, support worker).

It does not matter if questions remain unanswered because they are not relevant or not understood (ie. need more context to be able to answer it). If there is any stress, discomfort or anxiety relating to the completion of either IWPA form it does not need to be completed.

The IWPA Short Version explores the following areas:

- Communication preferences
- Tolerance of change
- Sensory preferences

An employee on the autism spectrum will need varied workplace supports and adjustments across the aforementioned areas. In the IWPA Short Version there is a separate section for each of these areas. Each section has a group of statements. At the end of each section there is an area for you to make notes. These notes should be transformed into a more helpful format in the work profile.

The jobseeker should respond to each statement with either 'Yes', 'No' or 'Not Sure'. If the jobseeker has not worked previously ask them to consider other environments such as school, university and volunteer work when answering the statements. In each section, this manual presents common characteristics of autistic people before replicating the statements from the IWPA Short Version. Then two groups of suggestions are made: the first explains how to evaluate the responses; the second suggests prompting questions for follow-up discussions. In the follow-up discussions you can prompt the jobseeker for more information. Ensure a combination of results from the IWPA Short Version and follow-up discussions are entered into the work profile.

The characteristics inherent in autism vary greatly from person to person, and as such every individual's experience of autism is different. The characteristics discussed in this assessment may not be relevant to every autistic jobseeker. It is important to treat each person on their merits, find out how they are impacted in each area, and develop a customised approach to learning their unique needs and preferences.

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Communication Preferences

Overview: The statements in this section aim to gain an understanding of an individual’s communication preferences. Communication, both verbal and non-verbal, is an important aspect of any interactions, including those in the workplace. Autistic individuals often require support and understanding in this area.

Common characteristics:

- Prefer unfamiliar information to be given in written or diagrammatic (if appropriate) formats
- Face-to-face communication is difficult, especially maintaining eye contact
- Have difficulty reading other people’s non-verbal communication, including gestures, facial expressions and body posture
- Require more time than others to process verbal information and formulate responses
- Have difficulty when a lot of people are talking at once; may experience difficulties focusing on the relevant conversation and ‘filter out’ the ‘background’ noise
- Often wanting to present as capable, individuals on the autism spectrum may not always be forthcoming in seeking clarification or asking for more information. Be willing to check in to ensure understanding or if an individual requires additional information
- Very literal with communication. Humour, sarcasm, idioms can be difficult to understand. Use caution and explain – build rapport first.

Communication Preferences		YES	NO	Not sure
1.	I would be okay with a job that requires a lot of face-to-face communication, for example greeting customers and answering customer questions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	I prefer to learn by doing, or by picture instructions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	Looking people in the eyes is sometimes difficult for me. (I am still listening and its easier for me to concentrate if I don’t look at you)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	I would like assistance in sharing my ideas and communicating in meetings or groups.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	I may sometimes need assistance to understand other people’s humour in the workplace. Tell me if you are using sarcasm or joking.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.	I may not be able to follow a conversation when multiple people are speaking at once.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.	I appreciate feedback on my performance with kind supports about areas I need to improve.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please Note:

Follow-up discussions may be required to get a better understanding of an individual’s communication preferences. Each individual on the autism spectrum is different and will have unique areas of need regarding communication.

Evaluation of responses:

For Question 1 a 'Yes' or 'Not sure' response for this question may suggest that an individual could be considered for roles that have some direct customer interaction. However, it is suggested that asking prompting questions and/or role-playing customer service situations may help to determine an individual's level of self-awareness in communication preferences. **A 'No' response** indicates that the individual is likely to experience heightened stress if placed in a customer facing role.

For Questions 2 to 7, 'Yes' or 'Not sure' responses for these questions may suggest that an individual may be more suited for a role that does not require a lot of communication with others. They may prefer to be assigned tasks, preferably in written or diagrammatic form, prior to working on tasks independently. The benefits of breaking down a task into steps with this information being conveyed in written as opposed to verbal form are:

- Written instructions can be read at different speeds. They cater to different people's capacities to absorb information.
- As written information is static, the message doesn't change so a job seeker can come back to the information at any point during completion of the task, in order to understand the next step of the process or seek clarification of a step in the process.

Suggested prompting questions:

- Do you prefer written or verbal communication when receiving instructions?
- Can you tolerate sarcasm and humour in the workplace? Once you become more comfortable would understanding improve?
- Do you use a strategy when eye contact becomes uncomfortable for you (for example, looking at the persons forehead or ear?)
- What could help you become more comfortable communicating in a group scenario or when attending social events?
- Would it be better if you had one main person in the workplace that you could go to if you had questions, or who you would trust to tell you if you did something wrong?

Tolerance of change

Overview: The statements in this section aim to gain an understanding of an individual’s ability to deal with and manage unexpected or unpredictable situations. As can be the case in many work environments, change often unexpectedly occurs.

Common characteristics:

- Prefer predictability and routine. They need to know what is happening or what has been scheduled in terms of work tasks
- Stress levels may increase as a result of being unable to predict what is happening with a work task. Stress can often be managed by detailing tasks in written or diagrammatic formats and by updating details if changes occur.

Tolerance of change		YES	NO	Not sure
9.	I prefer to not have unexpected changes at work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10.	Sometimes the smallest doubt can mean I cannot initiate or continue a task. I am not being lazy. It can be hard for me to ask for help.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11.	When I experience anxiety at work it reduces my ability to work effectively.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12.	I like knowing what my daily tasks are and what my expected output should be.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13.	I appreciate being pre warned about any changes that may affect me (for example a change in supervisor, change in work tasks, visitors or events)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14.	I prefer repetition and structure in my tasks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15.	I prefer it when my supervisor plans and prioritises my daily tasks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please Note: Follow-up discussions may be required to get a better understanding of an individual’s ability to deal with unexpected or unpredictable situations. Each individual on the spectrum is different and will have unique areas of need regarding uncertainty.

Evaluation of responses:

Majority of answers ‘Yes’ or ‘Not sure’: shows that uncertainty and unexpected change can create heightened anxiety which may impact work performance. If this is the case, an autistic individual may be more suited to a role that is predictable and has a consistent workflow with clearly explained instructions and deadlines. The need to handle multiple tasks with differing deadlines may heighten anxiety and stress levels. However, in the right role a jobseeker could demonstrate high levels of focus for extended periods of time.

Suggested prompting questions:

- Do you have strategies to help you regulate your frustrations in these scenarios?
- What could you do if you don't have all the information?
- How would you cope if your manager had to change the deadline? What are some of the things you could ask your manager?
- Would you be comfortable telling your manager that you prefer to receive warning of any upcoming changes?

Sensory Preferences

Overview: The statements in this section aim to gain an understanding of an individual’s sensory preferences and difficulties. There is value in understanding difficulties in sensory experiences that an individual may encounter in the workplace. Often, sensory difficulties may make it difficult for the individual to concentrate and participate. The difficulties may also increase their stress levels.

Common characteristics:

- Experience input received from different sensory modalities differently from most other people
- Sensory experiences may be of such intensity that they cause pain or discomfort to the individual
- May seek certain types of input from varying sensory modalities in order to stay focused on tasks, or to manage stress and anxiety.

Sensory Preferences	YES	NO	Not sure
Touch			
Certain textures of clothes are uncomfortable for me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I prefer to not have unpredicted sudden human touch (for example being tapped on my shoulder, being touched on my arm).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I can experience discomfort in crowded spaces or if people are in my personal space.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sight			
I can work more effectively when I am not in a brightly lit space (for example way from fluorescent lights)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would prefer to not work in an environment that has busy patterns.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A flickering light would mean that I am unable to do my work effectively.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hearing			
I concentrate better in a quiet workspace (for example where people are not talking a lot or playing music).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I prefer it if I am given warning of loud noises (for example fire alarms)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I hear ‘white noise’ that other people may not be able to hear (for example air conditioners and fridges).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I can concentrate better if I wear noise cancelling headphones.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Smell			
I can be bothered by strong smells, even those regarded as pleasant by others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Body and feelings			
I tend to bump into objects (for example doorways, tables, desks).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I prefer to have regular movement to help me to maintain focus.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
When I feel anxious or overwhelmed I do certain body movements to help calm me down.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I cannot always recognise when I am feeling stressed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I don't always know how to explain how I am feeling to other people.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It's not easy for me to understand the feelings of others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It's not always easy for me to identify facial expressions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am not good at remembering names and faces. I don't mean to be rude if I do not recognise someone.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please Note: Follow-up discussions may be required to get a better understanding of an individual's sensory preferences and difficulties. Each individual on the autism spectrum is different and will have unique areas of need regarding sensory preferences.

Evaluation of responses:

Majority of responses 'Yes' or 'Not sure' – The individual may benefit from an open discussion around accommodations in the environment that would assist in performing their role. It is important to note that many of these accommodations are minimal and low-cost.

By offering to accommodate an individual's sensory needs, it is likely that the individual on the spectrum will feel more comfortable and accepted in their workplace. The accommodations will also reduce anxiety or stress associated with managing sensory challenges.

Suggested Prompting Questions:

- What strategies have you used that have helped with your sensory sensitivities?
- What accommodations would you find helpful to assist you in managing your sensory difficulties and make you feel more comfortable in your workplace?

References

Carleton, R.N., Norton, M.A.P.J., & Asmundson, G.J.G (2007). Fearing the Unknown: A short version of the Intolerance of Uncertainty Scale. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders* 21, 105-117.
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