

At work: A guide to supporting autistic colleagues

Achieving neuro inclusive
practice within your workplace.

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What is autism?

Autistic people communicate, interact and process the world around them differently.

Society is predominantly designed by and for non-autistic people which can disadvantage autistic people.

Autism is NOT a mental health condition.

It is a neurological difference.

It often co-occurs with other conditions (eg ADHD, Dyslexia, Anxiety Disorder).

Around 33% of autistic people may also have a learning disability.

Diagnosis can occur at any age. **More than 1 in 100 people are diagnosed** but the true number of autistic people is significantly higher.

To find out more visit:

www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/what-is-autism



What could an autistic employee bring to your workplace

Autistic people often have a wide range of skills and strengths that would benefit any workplace. Being innovative thinkers, having an eye for detail and an ability to hyper-focus are all characteristics many employers would appreciate in prospective employees.



“When working in (police) intelligence, I could simultaneously interrogate several different databases recalling car registrations, names and numerous other facts and figures about hundreds of people. With this, I could make links and build profiles of vast networks.”

Suzanne

“My autism makes it easy for me to do things a lot of non-autistic people may struggle with. I work intensely when I’m painting, writing, composing or doing anything creative. I think being autistic also contributes to my aptitude in problem solving and pattern recognition, which can help me research a highly specialised subject and give talks on it.”

Patrick Samuel, autistic artist and musician



Why is there a need to support autistic people in the workplace?

Only 30% (30.2%) of autistic people are in employment.
53.0% of disabled people are in employment (DWP, 2024).

Autistic adults should be offered individualised support if they are having difficulty maintaining employment (NICE, 2012).

50% of autistic people said that support, understanding or acceptance would be the single biggest thing that would help them into employment.**

64% of employers said they do not know where to go for support or advice about employing autistic people.**

68% of employers worry about getting support for autistic employees wrong.**

*Autism Employment gap report National Autistic Society 2016;

**YouGov poll of 601 senior decision makers in private sector March 2019

“The pressure to fit in is huge and many autistic people, myself included, have developed coping mechanisms at work to cover being different. This is immensely draining and we do it at a big personal cost. Organisations need to change, not people.”

Vice Admiral Nick Hine –
Stories from the Spectrum



Considerations for supporting your autistic employees



Adapting systems and processes in your work environment would create a more inclusive workplace for everyone. Consider:

- Recruitment and onboarding
- Social and physical environment
- Managing workload
- Buddy system and mentoring
- Establishing an inclusive culture of acceptance, awareness and understanding
- Regular training for colleagues and managers

“Inclusion is not bringing people into what already exists; it is making a new space, a better space for everyone.”

George Dei

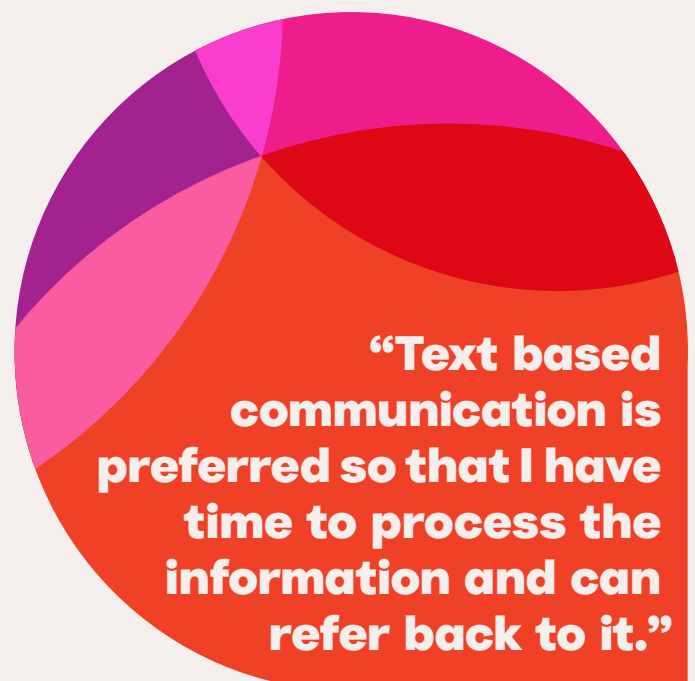


Recruitment

- Clear and unambiguous job descriptions
- Provide an information pack about your organisation including a timeline of the recruitment process
- Clear information on how to apply and who to contact for further information
- Provide detailed information about the interview including the questions that may be asked
- Prompt and allow for reasonable adjustment requests as well as explaining what adjustments you can offer
- Consider adapting the way you interview to be more inclusive, for example, virtual and less formal interviews, work trial etc?
- Consider the environment where the interview is being held
- Be aware of the physical environment and communication differences

Communication adjustments

- Make information clear, concise, unambiguous and logical
- Allow time for processing
- Consider communication preferences
- Check understanding



Environmental adjustments

- Ask what people's needs are
- Identified desk or workspace
- Consider desk or workspace positioning
- Consider lighting in work area
- Quiet areas (for work or breaks)
- Desk dividers
- Noise-cancelling headphones
- Sensory items
- Sunglasses or headphones

“I can achieve the perfect optimal working conditions if I am given some autonomy over my work environment where I can control some of the sensory aspects. My ability to hyper focus on a task for extended periods kicks in automatically which enables me to achieve a huge amount in a short space of time”

Suzanne



Additional support

- The National Autistic Society Autism Inclusive Employer programme launched in 2024, is the first autism specific quality programme and workplace accreditation in the UK.
- It is based on over 30 years of experience of working with organisations from many different sectors to ensure their autism knowledge and support achieves positive outcomes for both the autistic person and the organisation as a whole.
- Programme contains a variety of training and consultancy offers to suit your specific needs along with a framework of best practice to highlight improved ways of working and embed knowledge. This is all complimented by an accreditation mark to demonstrate your commitment and successes in this area

Benefits of the Inclusive Employer programme

- Enables you to gain the required knowledge and confidence in the field of autism as well as providing you with a framework to reflect on your current practice and understand where your strengths and required actions for development areas are.
- Demonstrates your commitment for neuro inclusive practices to employees, candidates, industry peers.
- Flexible process with a variety of different options to suit your specific needs, delivered in timescales that work for you.
- Adaptable programme that works for all organisations regardless of size, organisational spread or sector type.

Achieving the autism accreditation award is a significant accomplishment that highlights our commitment to inclusivity, understanding and tailored support. It demonstrates our dedication to creating an environment where autistic people can thrive, feel valued, and achieve their potential. This recognition reflects the hard work, compassion, and expertise of everyone involved.

Accreditation customer



What next?

Contact us to book a 30 minute discussion with our team to explore how we can support you further with your neuro inclusive journey:

www.autism.org.uk/what-we-do/autism-know-how/contact

Partner with our Corporate team: Incorporate fundraising into Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) efforts while promoting inclusivity:

www.autism.org.uk/get-involved/corporate

Sign up to our Autism Know How newsletter:

www.autism.org.uk/what-we-do/newsletter-form

Download our work poster for your staffroom:

https://nas.chorus.thirdlight.com/file/24/83aVu7M83ejiRY783IIS83dqTKg/Five-ways-workplace_WAAM25_202501.pdf



**National
Autistic
Society**

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