

Employment and Next Steps

>> **SEAN:** Having a sense of purpose doesn't just mean a full-time job for everyone.

It's important to practice being kinder to yourself with the new knowledge that you're autistic.

The most important thing is to consider first...

[REWIND SOUND EFFECT]

>> **SEAN:** Welcome back to video six from the Embrace autism Series.

In this video we're going to talk about employment.

Within the autistic community there are some quite harsh statistics about the level of unemployment and also the level of underemployment amongst the autistic community.

Part of my own journey, post diagnosis, was reworking out what a meaningful life looks like for me as an individual and what a sustainable life looks like for me as an individual.

And that means everything from having the amount of income that I need for paying bills, for keeping a roof over my head, plus also what isn't going to lead me to have poor mental health and what's not going to lead me to burnout.

What's going to be something that's sustainable for me to do now?

Part of that was me taking a step back from my previous life, looking at what worked, looking at what I enjoyed, looking at the things that contributed to me having a burnout.

It was also looking at what I wanted to have as a sense of purpose, as from now on, I was trying to be closer to my true authentic autistic self.

Having a sense of purpose has a proven link to improved mental wellbeing and doesn't just mean a full-time job for everyone.

A sense of purpose could be being a carer or parent, volunteering, working part-time, working for yourself or a combination of any of these.

Where you are at now, post-diagnosis or newly self-identifying, or maybe recovering from burnout, might mean that your sense of purpose changes and grows, as you do on your own journey.

It can be in some cases just about making a simple tweak...

If I look at my own life and my own career, I've generally been far happier, more balanced and had a generally better well-being when I've either been working for myself or I've been working for a smaller organisation.

It can be as simple as little tweaks like this.

It's important to practice being kinder to yourself with the new knowledge that you're autistic.

Part of unmasking is being honest with yourself... I used to do a horrendous daily commute to an employer that didn't value me, only my work, and it completely burnt me out.

And part of me unmasking and being honest with myself is admitting that, well... I might have done that 10 years ago but realistically... can I do that now?

No, I can't.

And that's okay.

I don't have to feel guilty about that and it's a far healthier way to accept and acknowledge that fact and then to rebuild my life around it.

Looking at your own journey post diagnosis, it might even be a blend... it might be that you do some volunteering, it might be that that you do a bit of part-time work...

It might be that the part-time work leads to full-time time work.

It might be that you do a bit of work for yourself, or you do a little bit of work for someone else, or a whole blend of all of this.

It's also a good time to take stock of what your strengths are, as well as what you enjoy doing and maybe think about using these in your future employment.

For example, if you loved organising but recognised that you weren't at your best with all the sensory impact of commuting or working in an office, then maybe a remote job working from home as a PA, a personal assistant, would be a good fit for you?

The most important thing is to consider first, what do I need to do and what's going to be sustainable for my mental well-being?

One of the worst things that you can do, in my opinion, is to force yourself into a situation and in six months' time, be burnt out and be without a job

again and to probably feel way worse than you do now because of what you put yourself through for the last six months.

It's also worth saying, that from my own experience, the most meaningful, great things to have in my life don't necessarily come quickly.

Be kind to yourself with the time frames that you both set for yourself and that you expect for starting to make changes in your life.

For me, it took decades to wait to find out that I was autistic and the changes that I've made post diagnosis have taken years.

But because I've spent time and I've been honest with myself, I've been able to rebuild a sustainable life, a life that I enjoy.

A life that meets all the areas that it needs to meet, both on a practical level, on a financial level, on a fulfilment level, but also on a health and well-being level too.

So... for the next steps after watching this video, we would encourage you again to meet more autistic people.

At the end of every video in our Embrace Autism series, we've got lots of links for different organisations, including our own and the National Autistic Society.

We've got the wider Embrace Autism program details, as well as links to other great organisations that work within the autism sector in Scotland.

A good tip is to have an open mind and try not to be too set on what your life was before your diagnosis.

Try and have an open mind about what your life could be post diagnosis.

We hope you've enjoyed these six videos.

We'd like to leave you with a little bit of food for thought, maybe some ideas to start working through, and maybe starting you off to think about what redesigning and rebuilding your life as a newly discovered autistic person looks like.

We'd encourage you not to do this by yourself.

We've mentioned quite a lot of the support available over the course of the six videos and there's a lot more information available linked to each of the videos that you've seen.

To leave this on a positive note, certainly for me, my diagnosis was the start of a whole process.

It wasn't the end and it'd be quite easy to say, "okay, well I've got my diagnosis, that's it, everything's solved".

For me, most of the meaningful changes in my life and what's made me really happy, have come as steps and decisions that I've made knowing that I'm autistic and following on from getting a diagnosis.

Finding the autistic community and being a part of it has been very helpful, as well as healing for me.

This may help you over the next stages of your own journey.

We hope you've enjoyed the video, and that you decide to explore what it is to be autistic to you.

[END OF VIDEO]