



Practical Tips For Employers Download

This download accompanies the masterclass videos found on the AsIAm website.

Recruitment

Your first action should be taking a step back and looking at your recruitment process. Ask yourself if you are providing a welcoming environment for autistic job seekers, such as postings and interview processes. Everyone gets nervous in job interviews, but the process can be especially anxiety inducing for autistic people. The employer can make their recruitment process more welcoming for autistic adults through a few key actions.

- **Consider location:** Will the interview be conducted in a busy area where the interviewee may be distracted by noise? Is the lighting fluorescent? Are there any strong odours such as plants or aftershave in the room? Sensory accessibility can be just as important as physical accessibility for autistic people. If they are processing several strong sensory events at once, they won't be in a good position to answer your questions.
- **Remove Uncertainty:** The unknown is a source of major anxiety for autistic people at the best of times. Anticipating what could go wrong or changes in routine are common thoughts which occur in their minds. Situations like job interviews are especially tough this way because the process' success is dependent on the person performing their best in front of a group of total strangers.

Try to inform applicants beforehand of the location and details of the interview. Sending interview questions in advance can help a great deal alleviating anxiety. Autistic people are intelligent, but may take time to articulate their thoughts. Providing these questions allow the applicant to prepare a response which is far more reflective of their capabilities.

- **Be mindful of language:** Autistic people tend to speak directly and honestly. It's important not to mistake this for bluntness or a disregard for etiquette. Autistic people think in very literal terms and this is reflected in their interactions with other people. They may struggle to understand vague terms, generalisations and sarcasm.

When speaking with an applicant who is autistic, use plain language as much as you can. Include as much detail as you can when asking questions and ensure that you clarify what you mean. If they are brief in their greetings or goodbyes, or don't respond to a joke, understand they are not being curt: they are interpreting the situation on terms they can understand.

This extends to body language. Take efforts to understand how your non-verbal cues may differ between you and the applicant. A firm handshake is a popular suggestion in preparing for a job interview. However, autistic people may avoid shaking hands if they are hypersensitive to touch. Similarly, eye contact is stressed as an important quality in applicants. A lack of eye contact can be misinterpreted as a lack of interest or uncertainty in answers. In fact this can be the opposite in autistic applicants, as it can be difficult to listen to the question and make eye contact at the same time. An autistic applicant looking down or away is often a sign they are listening or thinking carefully.

Once you put these measures place, make sure to include them in the job posting. They will signal to prospective employees that your company is taking autism friendly employment seriously. This will result in a greater number of applications and hopefully early disclosure.

Reasonable Accommodations:

Reasonable Accommodations are changes or adaptations you can make to the workplace, such as adjustments to the workplace environment or to a specific work routine or practice, which supports autistic people and people with other disabilities to carry out their work and access the same training and development opportunities on an equal footing as their non-disabled colleagues.

These include making changes to the workplace environment, making adjustments to workplace practices and providing technology or equipment which can support an autistic employee at work. It also entails offering flexible working hours, substituting workplace tasks and providing access to training and workplace supports. Sensory accommodations will be a common support need, as many autistic people may have difficulties with lights, noises or odours. Additionally, the use of stim toys or items such as chewable objects or fidget spinners is common while autistic people are attempting to concentrate. It's important to recognise that wearing headphones or fidgeting with an item are not signs of distraction or disinterest in work. Quite the opposite, these are attempts to regulate their environment in order to focus on the task at hand.

As an employer you should carefully consider what supports can be used to empower and optimize autistic adults in their work. The supports may vary depending on the autistic person's sensory needs and preferred communication style. Some autistic people may prefer to communicate via voice notes while others may only text. If you are in doubt about what reasonable accommodations to provide, just ask! The autistic person in question is best qualified to inform you of what supports they may require.

It's important to note that you are obliged to provide these accommodations under Section 16 of the Employment Equality Act if an employee decides to disclose that they're autistic. Denying Reasonable Accommodation to employees constitutes as discrimination under the Act, unless applying the accommodation would pose a 'disproportionate burden' on the employer. In this instance, a 'disproportionate burden' relates to the financial costs of the proposed accommodations, if the accommodation has a disproportionate impact on staff time and productivity, or if the proposed accommodation fundamentally changes the nature of the job in question. You also may need to consider whether you can access public funding like the Reasonable Accommodation Fund that can support you to put the accommodation in place

Workplace culture:

While recruitment and reasonable accommodations are important steps in locating, hiring and retaining autistic staff, it is important that these measures are backed up by culture of autism acceptance in the workplace. Whilst many organisations might assume that they may not need to make

changes to their practices unless an employee decides to disclose as autistic and makes a request for accommodations, there's also a number of things an employer can do to make their workplace practices more supportive of autistic staff before they even need to request it.

Consider organising a [training day](#) for the entire staff on disability and autism to help explain why their colleagues work and interact in certain ways. Introduce a mentor or buddy scheme to help autistic employees integrate into the workplace. Encourage staff members invite their autistic colleague (if they wish to go) to social events outside work. Remember that an autistic-friendly workplace is a people-friendly workplace. These measures won't just help autistic people -they can also support everyone. This will help make your organisation more inclusive in the long run.

Consider going one step further and encourage certain work approaches and communication methods available for the entire staff. Normalise the use of stim toys and sensory supports. Encourage the use of different or written forms of communication like emails, or instant messaging platforms like WhatsApp, Teams or Slack, instead of just using phone calls, as this can give autistic people the time and space to feel included and fully participate in workplace discussions. Discourage loud noise or strong odours in designated work areas to make the sensory environment easier to manage for autistic staff. Make sure you have clear policies in place for working from home (AsIAM has discussed the great opportunity that remote work has presented to the autistic community [as seen in our policy submission here](#)). These measures will prevent the autistic employee from feeling like they are in a separate workflow.

This will benefit workers who may not be aware that they are autistic, who might not have access to a formal diagnosis, who might not feel ready to 'come out' and be open about their autistic identity, or who might not feel comfortable or confident to ask for changes. Having possible accommodations for individuals listed in a policy or agreement will make it easier for the individual to request these supports when they need it.

An autistic-friendly workplace that is one that recognises not just how autistic talent can contribute to your organisation, but also the benefits that a neurodiverse workforce and neurodiverse ways of completing work can bring to your organisation. Any employer who fully nurtures and utilizes the potential of autistic adults in the workforce is likely to see benefits such as increased staff engagement and productivity, to stimulating growth and innovation across the organisation to being more responsive to changing market conditions.