

Workplace accommodations for Autistic adults

Workplace accommodations are changes to the work environment or way things are done that allow employees to perform their job duties effectively. If you are an Autistic adult about to enter the workforce or already working, you may benefit from accommodations in the workplace. Research shows that appropriate accommodations can significantly improve employment outcomes and job satisfaction for Autistic individuals. This information sheet summarises research about the types of accommodations that are most helpful and provides tips for requesting them.

Our purpose a different brilliant®

Understanding, engaging
and celebrating the strengths,
interests and aspirations of people
on the autism spectrum.

The potential of Autistic employees

While no two individuals are the same, Autistic people tend to be honest, reliable, detail-oriented and have above-average focus when interested in tasks.

Autistic people may also have particular traits in the following areas:

- **Communication** – may have preferences for direct, literal communication and written information over verbal instructions.
- **Social interactions** – may have lower social motivation and difficulty interpreting nonverbal cues.
- **Patterns of behaviour** – may benefit from structure and routine; have intense interests that enhance focus.
- **Sensory experience** – may be sensitive to certain sounds, lighting, textures, etc that are overwhelming or distracting.
- **Emotion regulation** – may have heightened anxiety or express themselves differently, especially in social situations.

With the right supports, these traits can be strengths at work rather than barriers.

Implementing accommodations

Research shows the following steps lead to more successful implementation of accommodations:

- Find a job that matches your skills, interests and needs.
- Seek employers committed to inclusivity and accepting differences.
- Educate your employer about your Autistic traits.
- Collaborate with your employer to find optimal solutions.
- Maintain open communication and evaluate regularly.



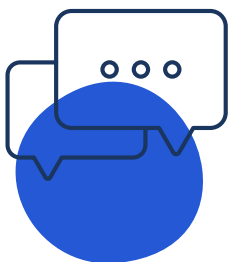
The job interview

Traditional job interviews often don't work well for Autistic adults. Open-ended questions can be confusing, causing uncertainty about how much to say. There may be unspoken rules about eye contact and behaviour which add to this uncertainty and make the experience more stressful.

By asking the employer to make small changes, you can show your true talents in a job interview. The right employer will appreciate you explaining your needs, so don't be afraid to ask for accommodations that allow you to excel. You deserve a fair chance.

Changes that can make the interview fairer include:

- **Asking for the questions in advance** – this lets you prepare and feel less anxious.
- **Requesting written answers if talking is hard** – writing can be easier to show your skills.
- **Suggesting more specific questions if broad ones are unclear** – providing detailed examples allows you to show your abilities.
- **Asking how the interview will be structured and timed** – knowing what to expect is less stressful.
- **Asking the employer to focus on your skills rather than social presentation** – you want to be judged on merit.



Autism disclosure

Whether or not to tell someone you are Autistic is your decision. It can be helpful to consider the benefits and risks of autism disclosure before you decide.

Benefits of autism disclosure

- Allows you to advocate for accommodations and supports you need to succeed at work.
- Increases employer awareness about autism – helps them support you better.
- Can improve acceptance and inclusion in the workplace.
- Helps co-workers understand social and communication differences you may have.

Risks of autism disclosure

- Possibility of prejudice or discrimination based on autism stigma.
- Employer may have limited understanding of autism and your needs.

The Aspect Research Centre for Autism Practice (ARCAP) has co-produced **guides** to help Autistic people navigate disclosure.



Tips when asking for accommodations

When asking for accommodations, start by having an open discussion with your employer or supervisor about your needs and preferences. Focus on your abilities and explain how your Autistic traits affect your work performance and social interactions. Share suggestions for accommodations that have been helpful to you in the past, and be open to collaborating with your employer to find effective solutions if needed.

Keep in mind that requesting accommodations is an ongoing process, especially as your needs or job responsibilities change, so it's important to follow up regularly.

If you're unsure about what you need to succeed, that's okay. We've included some suggestions below to help you get started.



Accommodations you could ask for

Communicating job duties/instructions

- Clear, literal, step-by-step instructions, written down or visually demonstrated.
- Advance notice of changes and new job tasks.
- Regular feedback on job performance.
- Designate one main supervisor or mentor for questions/concerns.
- All instructions and feedback in writing.
- Avoid use of sarcasm/irony in all communication.
- Email/verbal reminders for deadlines.
- Pre-warning for any out-of-routine occurrences like extra meetings or overtime.

Managing time and tasks

- Visual supports like checklists, calendars, to-do lists and reminders.
- Divide large assignments/tasks into smaller steps.
- Allow flexible work hours and breaks if needed.
- Provide a quiet space to focus.
- Assistance or mentoring using electronic organisation tools.
- Training on how to best use work programs.

Social communication

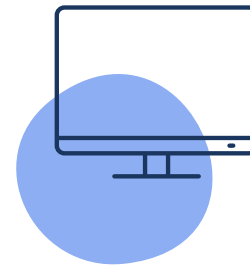
- Options for communicating electronically versus face-to-face.
- Limit required social events and meetings.
- Workplace mentor.
- Disability awareness training for colleagues.
- Reduce expectations to join social events.
- Specific verbal encouragement to speak during meetings.

Physical environment

- Noise-cancelling headphones or private office space.
- Allow dimmer lighting if sensitive to bright lights.
- Organise workspace to limit visual distractions.
- Allow regular sensory breaks away from workspace.
- Temperature adjustments like fans, air-conditioner, mini-heater.
- Lighting adjustments like altered lights or filters.
- Reduce air freshener and perfume use.

Other accommodations

- Allow work from home.
- Flexi-time.
- Set workspace (no hot-desking).
- Friendly mentor as first contact for issues.
- Clothing adjustments like uniform modifications.
- Phone alerts set to a quieter setting.



Useful resources

Web

Amaze:

amaze.org.au/2023/06/10-things-employers-can-do-to-support-autistic-staff

Autism Alliance of Canada:

autismalliance.ca/resource/accommodations-checklist

Autism Awareness Australia:

autismawareness.com.au/aupdate/what-do-autistic-employees-need-to-be-successful-in-the-workplace

National Autistic Society:

autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/employment/employing-autistic-people/employers

Based on the idea of a different brilliant®, Aspect's approach:

- Respects difference and diversity
- Builds a person's skills based on their strengths, interests, aspirations and support needs
- Develops autism-friendly environments
- Supports others to understand and embrace autism and to develop respectful supportive interactions.