



Institute
and Faculty
of Actuaries

Guidance for employers

Supporting employees with autism

June 2021

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Benefits to the workplace

There are many benefits to having neurodiverse employees in the workplace. Employing an autistic person demonstrates your organisation's commitment to equality and diversity, and shows a positive attitude to disabled people. Having a diverse workforce brings benefits to staff and business alike, and managers and colleagues often describe working with an autistic colleague as an enriching experience that encourages them to think more carefully about how they communicate, organise and prioritise their work.

Tips and strategies to support your autistic employees in the workplace

There are many things you could and should be doing to support your autistic employees in the workplace. Here are some tips and strategies and links to further areas of information and support.

Clarify expectations of the job

You may need to be more explicit about your expectations for an autistic member of staff. As well as the job description, you will probably need to explain the etiquette and unwritten rules of the workplace. Make it clear that any adaptations for them in the workplace are there to help them do their job well, not because they are not good enough.

Provide training and monitoring

Clear and structured training is invaluable. This can be provided informally by a manager, colleagues or a mentor, or may take the form of more formal training. Various organisations and schemes offer job coaches, and funding for this form of training may be available from [Access to Work](#) via the Department of Work and Pensions. A list of training courses provided by the National Autistic Society can be found [here](#). The IFoA supports the [Actuarial Mentoring Programme](#), designed to improve diversity within the actuarial profession.

Make sure instructions are concise and specific

Try to give your employee clear instructions about exactly how to carry out each task from start to finish, as this will lay the foundations for good working practices. Don't assume the person will infer your meaning from informal instructions – for example, rather than saying "Give everybody a copy of this", say "Make three photocopies of this, and give one each to Sam, Mary and Ahmed". Using specific deadline instructions such as "Email me the final version of the report by 5pm on Friday" is clearer than "Get it to me by the end of the week". You may also choose to provide written instructions as these are very useful for the autistic person to be able to refer back to for clarity.

Ensure the work environment is well-structured

Some autistic people need a fairly structured work environment. You can help by working with them to prioritise activities, organising tasks into a timetable for daily, weekly and monthly activities, and breaking larger tasks into small steps. Some people will appreciate precise information about start and finish times, and help getting into a routine with breaks and lunches.

Regularly review performance

As with any employee, line managers should have regular one-to-one meetings with the person to discuss and review performance and give overall comments and suggestions. For an autistic staff member, brief but frequent reviews may be better than longer sessions at less frequent intervals. Autistic people may need time to process instructions or to consider a response to a request so any immediate answer relating to capacity to do a task may not be an accurate evaluation.

Provide sensitive but direct feedback

Autistic people often find it difficult to pick up on social cues, so make sure your feedback is honest, constructive and consistent. If they complete a task incorrectly, don't allude to, or imply, any problems – instead, explain tactfully but clearly why it is wrong, check that they have understood, and set out exactly what they should do instead. Be aware that some autistic people may have low self-esteem or experience of being bullied, so ensure that any criticism is sensitive, and give positive feedback wherever appropriate.

Provide reassurance in stressful situations

Autistic people can be quite meticulous, and can become anxious if their performance is not perfect. This means they may become stressed in a situation such as an IT failure. You can help by giving concrete solutions to these situations, for example by explaining "If the photocopier breaks, use the one on the third floor". Similarly, reassure them that if they occasionally arrive late due to transport problems, or other unpreventable factors, this is not a problem. Your employee may benefit from having a mentor or buddy in the workplace – an empathetic colleague who they can go to if they are feeling stressed, anxious or confused.

Support your staff member to prepare for changes

Give information about changes to the workplace or tasks well in advance. This includes things like their line manager being on annual leave and who to report to/call in sick to during those days. Be aware that key times of the year such as Christmas may have an impact on autistic people as there may be lots of changes to normal workplace interactions/situations that others consider 'happy' or 'fun' but may be distressing to the autistic person.

Ask about sensory distractions

Autistic employees sometimes benefit from things like screens around their desk, noise-cancelling headphones, or their desk being in the corner (either facing out so no-one can approach them without being seen, or facing the wall so there are no visual distractions beyond the screen). It is important to tailor support to the individual and ask your employee about what they need.

Help other staff to be more aware

If your autistic employee consents to their condition being disclosed (remember that autism counts as a medical condition under data protection purposes) then providing colleagues with information and guidance on autism can benefit everyone. Sometimes the employee may find it helpful to write a document for other staff explaining what their colleagues can do to support them.

You can read more about the personal and professional experiences of members with autism on the IFoA's blogs.

For further information, please visit:

[Employing autistic people – a guide for employers](#)

[Top autism tips: employment - recruitment and interviews](#)



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