

Workplace Advocacy and Supports for Autistic Employees

Preparing and requesting supports can help employees feel more comfortable in your workplace, and set them up to be more successful at their job.



This sheet offers a short list of recommendations for supports that a company and/or an ERG can advocate for to better support Autistic colleagues. These best practices can benefit all employees as well.



Working Environment

- **Office Lighting:** Bright lights, such as fluorescent overhead lights can be distracting and contribute to sensory concerns. Assign a workspace with different lighting, i.e. desk lamps or floor lamps, with natural light being preferable.
- **Noise Levels:** Modern open office plans can make it difficult for Autistic individuals with sensory sensitivities to focus. Assigning a desk in a quiet area, or normalizing the use of noise-buffering earplugs, earbuds or noise-canceling headphones can enable far more productivity.



Workplace Options

- **Schedule:** Advocate for a flexible schedule system in order for Autistic individuals to work optimally during hours of increased attentiveness/productiveness. These schedules allow for individuals to have time for mental rest in order to refocus and reorient into their work.
- **Flexible Work Environment:** Not all roles can be made to work remotely, however if possible, this support can be an excellent alternative for employees and colleagues.
- **Job Coach:** Work to both advocate and destigmatize the option to have a job coach. These individuals provide on-site training to your employee or colleague and will assist them in performing their role.



Organizational Awareness & Company Culture:

- **Intentionality:** One of the best things you can do to support Autistic employees and colleagues is make it clear that the organization takes Autism and neurodiverse supports seriously. Be visible in the supports and programs that are created, having representation from all over the organization, from C-suite to support staff.
- **Disclosure and Accommodations:** Make sure your company's accommodation process is both transparent, private, and not a barrier to your employees and colleagues. While it is up to the employee to disclose, make sure that it is a supportive and easy process to manage.
- **Be an Audience:** Allow for Autistic employees to be leaders at their own pace; embrace listening sessions and be open to dialogue around individualized accommodations and productivity.
- **Inclusion Training:** Discuss the opportunity for a team training on inclusive practices; ask to include a section on Autism to share information, facts, and how to be respectful and inclusive.
- **Peer to Peer Supports:** Being mentored by a longtime employee can help provide guidance. These supports can be singular mentorship roles, or can be a circle of mentors. An employee resource group (ERG) could be part of developing these supports.



Communication

- **Plain Language:** Be clear and concise when communicating with your employee or colleague. Avoid using figurative language, idioms, and sarcasm, as it may lead to communication barriers and/or misunderstandings.
- **Task Planning:** Advocate for managers to examine how tasks are prioritized and given to an employee. Written instructions, prioritization lists, check-list, or even color coded systems are all useful ways of supporting time management and executive functioning. Understand that your employee or colleague may need to discuss extra time to process information, conversations or tasks.
- **Agenda Planning:** Advocate for agenda and meeting expectations to be sent in advance; and whenever possible, stick to the agenda.
- **Meetings:** If meetings can be held virtually or hybrid, allow for that option. Make sure to enable closed captions and a chat box, and record the meeting for additional communication and processing. In addition, allow for flexibility regarding cameras for individual processing needs.
- **Visual Aids:** Icons, imagery or pictures can help explain tasks, ideas, or schedules.
- **Reminders:** Meeting reminders like computer alerts, and email alerts can help your employee or colleague prepare and attend meetings.
- **Ongoing Check-In's:** Supervisors should schedule weekly or bi-weekly meetings with employees to ensure that Autistic individuals can discuss work-related questions, gather feedback, and/or review challenges; this also allows for time to discuss if these accommodations meet their needs or if additional supports are needed.