



Gwent Integrated Autism Service

Employment: Disclosure and reasonable adjustments in the workplace

Summary of contents

The information in this leaflet is intended to give autistic people some guidance about how to disclose their diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) to an employer.

There are some useful ideas about how to reduce anxiety during interviews and some strategies that individuals can use to make the workplace a less stressful place. In addition to this, there is some information for employers to enable them to utilise the skills and talents that autistic employees have.

It is important to understand that the needs of autistic employees will vary from person to person and as such, each individual's strengths and challenges will be different.

People with ASD are able to do many different types of jobs and have a variety of skills that enable them to be successful. The types of jobs that usually suit autistic people are:

- Routine-based and have clear structure.
- Jobs that have rules and defined boundaries.
- Jobs that require logical thinking.
- Ones that avoid too many social interactions or positions that require complicated people skills.
- Ones that have understanding employers or a knowledge of ASD, who can offer reasonable adjustments and support.

Part time employment can suit some people particularly if they have other commitments or are claiming Job Seekers Allowance where they need to work 16 hours or less.

Always check with the Job Centre to see if any full or part time work will affect your benefits.

Disclosure and work

When should I disclose my diagnosis of ASD?

Disclosing your diagnosis is a personal choice and you have control over who you tell or don't tell as well as when to tell someone about your ASD. You can tell an employer about your ASD any time you want to and you can do this by;

- Ticking a box or writing it on the application form to indicate that you have a disability (if there is box or an area for you to do this).
- During the interview.
- Once your employment starts.

Tip: Don't put your diagnosis on your CV – CVs are short documents designed for people to list their strengths and abilities and not their autism or medical conditions.

The Positives of disclosing your diagnosis

If you decide to disclose your diagnosis when applying for a job or whilst already employed it can help an employer to;

- Understand any difficulties or challenges that you may have.
- Seek advice or information to support and assist you.
- Develop ways of promoting your skills and talents.
- Make certain changes in the workplace to accommodate any difficulties that you may have. These are called 'Reasonable Adjustments'.

Concerns about disclosing a diagnosis

Sometimes people have concerns about disclosing their diagnosis when they apply for a job or whilst they are already in employment. The most frequent things that people worry about include;

- Disclosure affecting their chances of being successful at interview.

- Being discriminated or rejected.
- Feeling that their ASD has no bearing on their ability to do the job.
- Feeling that others will treat them differently.

How should I disclose my diagnosis of ASD?

Always remember that there is no right or wrong way of telling someone that you have a diagnosis of ASD.

If you are going to disclose your diagnosis to someone you might want to think about some of the points below;

- Try and talk positively about your diagnosis - you can do this by talking about the things that you are good at or specific skills that you have. It's also okay to talk about the things that you find challenging but try and avoid talking about them for too long or too many times.
- Be informed - understand how your ASD affects you. Perhaps you could make a list of your strengths as well as the things that you find challenging before you tell someone. Having a list can help structure the conversation and you can refer back to it at any time.
- Only tell people information about you that you want them knowing - you don't have to tell people everything about you.
- Make sure what you say is relevant and appropriate - if you are going to tell someone that you are autistic, only talk about this. Avoid talking about unrelated topics such as politics, religion or things that are not related to your diagnosis.
- Use language that is respectful to both you and the person you are disclosing to. Avoid talking about yourself negatively, using swear words or becoming frustrated or angry.

Reasonable adjustments – how can an employer help me?

Under the Equality Act 2010, an employer has the responsibility to ensure that reasonable adjustments are made in order to get rid of any barriers faced by disabled employees. ASD is classed as a disability; therefore your rights are protected by law and it is advised that employers should discuss ways in which they can help you at work.

The term 'Reasonable' needs to be reasonable to both **you** and the **employer**. Large companies or organisations might be able to grant certain reasonable adjustments, particularly ones that involve time, money or resources. Smaller businesses might not be able to make the same changes if they impact on budgets or put additional work commitments or pressures on a small team of employees.

It is important to remember that many reasonable adjustments can be made that are free and merely require a change in;

- The way information is communicated.
- Slight amendments to how a person performs their job.
- Simple alterations to the work environment.

Reasonable adjustments that can be made before the interview

- Ask for a copy of the interview questions before the date of your interview if this is possible. This will allow you enough time to think about your answers and will help you give the best response during the interview.
- Ask if you could meet the people who will be interviewing you prior to your interview. This may help reduce some anxiety because you will be more familiar with the people interviewing you.
- Visit the building where the interview will be taking place to familiarize yourself with what it looks like, who or where to report to and how to get there.

Tip: If you are travelling to the interview by public transport. Make sure you research the route you need to take and what time bus or train to catch.

Good planning will allow you enough time to travel and make your way to the interview in plenty of time.

Reasonable adjustments that can be made in the workplace

Below is a list of reasonable adjustments or suggestions that you could request from your employer in order to help you in your job. These can help reduce anxiety, improve your understanding of what's expected of you and ways of managing any sensory differences that you may have. If you think that these are helpful then you should discuss these reasonable adjustments with your employer.

- Using rotas, timetables or other visual planners to give you structure and enable you to plan your working week or month.
- Provide you with agendas ahead of meetings - this can really help some people prepare for or predict the content of meetings. It is important that the agenda is adhered to in order for some autistic people to follow.
- Clear lines of management - this is helpful because it provides people with a process of who, when and how to contact their manager should they need advice or have any difficulties.
- Regular supervision or 1-2-1 meetings to discuss the things that you are good at, the things you find challenging or any training needs that you may have.
- A clear list of your job role, responsibilities and the expectations of how your employer would like you to behave in the workplace.
- A discreet way or system of telling your manager that you are having difficulties and need time out, a chat or some support. This could be achieved by email, telling your manager, using an agreed phrase/word or a form of body language such as a nod.
- A quiet place to have a short break when required.
- Altering your working environment to suit your sensory needs such as resetting the colour scheme on a computer, turning the brightness down/up or changing the settings to suit your needs.
- Using things to manage your sensory needs such as dark glasses, wearing headphones etc.

Consult with your employer if these are safe to use in your role; for example it might not be safe to use headphones in a job where you need to listen out for danger e.g. working in a warehouse with forklift trucks operating.

- Using a desk lamp instead of fluorescent strip lighting.
- Getting someone to change flickering light bulbs if they are distracting or painful to you.
- Turning your desk around so that you are not sat with your back to the room.
- Asking to sit in a quieter part of the office.
- Taking your lunch break in a quiet room or taking it at a time when others have returned back to work.
- Your employer to arrange ASD awareness training to your work colleagues to enable them to understand the difficulties associated with autism and ways of helping you.

This is your choice – you might not want everyone knowing that you have a diagnosis.

What is the next step?

If you think that any of these would be helpful to you then you should discuss these reasonable adjustments with your manager or occupational health department to see whether they are able to put these into place.

Always ensure that your employer knows why you want any potential adjustments to be made and how this will positively affect both you and them.

If they agree to making changes in the workplace ensure that you have this confirmed in writing or an email in order to protect this agreement should circumstances change in the future.

If your employers are unable to make some reasonable adjustments to help you make sure that they provide you with the reason(s) of why this is not feasible. As previously mentioned, reasonable adjustments have to be reasonable to you and your employer but the majority of reasonable adjustments do not cost anything and usually do not put any additional pressure on others to put in place.

Reasonable Adjustments - Employer

Recruitment

Various sensory, social and cognitive issues may present problems for autistic people in the recruitment process. For instance, in order to find the best candidate for the post, it might be best to:

- Be clear in the job description about what exactly the post requires, rather than using vague terms (such as an "excellent communicator").
- Make competency questions available to the candidates before the interview - to allow time to think about the best response.
- Use more relaxed and less formal interview techniques, this will help reduce an applicant's anxiety.
- Allow pre-interview visits to the site; this can be an important part of managing someone's anxiety on the day of the interview. Allowing a visit can enable someone to process where they need to go or where they need to report to more effectively.
- Offer to meet the person before the interview. This can be hugely beneficial in reducing stress and anxiety because it provides a person with predictability of who will be present on the day of the interview.

Communication tips for the employer

Maintain consistent and clear communication by:

- Giving fewer verbal instructions to avoid 'overloading'.
- Giving instructions at a steady pace to enable someone to process what you are saying - don't talk too fast (this will vary from person to person and some people will have no problems with this at all).
- Reducing the amount of 'small talk' in the interview i.e. talking about the weather or asking what they did on the weekend etc. This can sometimes be tricky for some people because they might not know how to respond appropriately or they might have no interest in talking about these things.
- Try and avoid sarcasm or metaphors as this can be confusing - use language without 'hidden meanings'.
- Adopt a more patient, even and calm tone of voice when giving instructions.

Supporting autistic employees to manage change in the workplace

- Giving as much notice as possible to the employee to allow them to process and adapt to change in the workplace i.e. changes to rotas, meetings etc.
- When discussing changes with an employee, give them valid reasons why things are changing to enable them to understand why a specific change is necessary.
- Many autistic people tend to be strong visual learners so writing the relevant information about any changes in bullet points can help an employee to process the finer details of what is likely to happen (what?, when?, who?, why? and how?).

Managing change can vary from person to person because we all differ in our ability to receive information, process it, plan what we are going to do and how we are going to adapt to any changes that affect us. Giving the right amount of notice and support can enable autistic people to process and understand changes or planned events in the workplace and can help someone to regulate their anxiety more effectively.

Give visual support to convey instructions by;

- Writing a 'To do list' - the employer can do this with the employee using bullet points or pictures (dependent on their preferred learning style) which can enable people to follow instructions in order of priority/importance. People with autism are very talented at their jobs and will apply themselves 100% but some people find planning, organising and prioritising difficult in the workplace.
- Using structured templates to complete aspects of their job i.e. action plans, food safety etc dependent on their job.
- Information presented in the form of graphs, pie charts or flow charts can be a good way of communicating instructions.

Allow an autistic employee to regulate their anxiety and emotions by;

- Giving them some quiet time if they are visibly upset or anxious. Most people have good intentions and will ask someone lots of questions to see if they are okay. This can be overwhelming for someone with an ASD and

sometimes being left alone for a while can help someone compose themselves.

- Giving someone 'time out' can enable a person to be more productive and can be an important reasonable adjustment to support emotional wellbeing in the workplace. The employer's ability to allow 'time out' will vary dependant on factors such as resources, time, staffing and/or environment. If an employer permits 'time out' then it needs to be reasonable to both the employer and the employee.

If 'time out' is allowed then the employer should work with the employee to find a suitable way for him/her to indicate when they are anxious or overwhelmed. Ideally this should be discreet and could be a visual system (using an agreed gesture or showing a supervisor a card) or a verbal system (saying a specific word or phrase to a supervisor).

Useful links and contacts

Organisation	Telephone number	Email address/Website
Gwent Integrated Autism Service	01633 644143	asdservice.abb@wales.nhs.uk
Various Job Centre Plus offices in Gwent		https://www.jobcentrenearme.com/
Remploy	0300 456 8070	newport@mail.remploy.co.uk, www.remploy.co.uk
Disability Advice Project	01633 485865	info@dapwales.org.uk, www.dapwales.org.uk
Disability Can Do	01495 233555	http://www.disabilitycando.org.uk/aboutus/default.htm
Careers Wales	0800 028 4844 029 2090 6800	https://www.careerswales.com/en/
Bridges into Work 2 (Caerphilly) Bridges into Work 2 (Torfaen)	01495 237921 01633 647743	bridgesintowork@caerphilly.gov.uk employability@torfaen.gov.uk,
Bridges into Work 2 (Blaenau Gwent)	01495 356019	BiW2@aneurinleisure.org.uk
Journey 2 Work (Monmouthshire)	01495 745769, 07794 346223	J2W@monmouthshirehousing.co.uk
Disability Law Services	02920 388398	https://dls.org.uk/ , https://dls.org.uk/free-advice/online-advice/factsheets/
ACAS	(Helpline) 0300 123 1100	http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1461 , http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/s/k/Disability_discrim_keypoints_workplace_Nov.pdf
Communities For Work		https://gov.wales/topics/people-and-communities/communities/communities-for-work/?lang=en