

Advice For Co-workers

The most useful way to support autistic individuals in the workplace is to increase your knowledge and understanding of autism. A basic introduction to autism can be found here:

neurodivergencewales.org/en/i-am-neurodivergent/i-am-autistic/what-is-autism

Social Interaction

Social Interactions can be difficult to navigate and often increase anxiety levels for autistic people. Understanding communication differences can go a long way to alleviating these anxieties and improves the experience for all parties.

When meeting new colleagues, autistic people may need a little more time to become familiar with individualised humour or topics of interests. Making those unwritten office rules clear and explicit can be really helpful.

Some other things that may help:

- Avoid hypothetical conversations and social chit chat, make conversations purposeful and focus on facts and interests.
- Don't assume the individual is deliberately being rude or offensive - autistic people tend to use non-verbal signals differently.
- Recognise the individual's wishes and interests, don't force them to attend parties or after work drinks etc.
- Explain social expectations, don't assume your colleague will know what to wear or how to act in new or unusual work situations.

Social Communication

Autistic people communicate differently: eye contact, facial expressions, tone of voice, body language and gesture may vary from what you are used to. These communication differences can lead to autistic people being misunderstood or their intentions being misinterpreted. Conversely, autistic people may misunderstand or misinterpret your non-verbal communication. Patience and understanding go a long way.

Some things that may help:

- Use literal language, say what you mean and avoid idiom or metaphor.
- Be precise, if you mean you will help when you have finished your current activity, explain that. Do not use phrases like 'in a minute' or 'I'll help you later'.

- Use language to express yourself rather than relying on body language or tone of voice to share emotion.
- Allow the individual to avoid eye contact if they wish, it probably makes them feel more comfortable.
- Break down long instructions into shorter ones, support with notes or lists.

Predictability and Routines

Many autistic people need time to plan and prepare for change so often prefer the predictability of structure and routines. Where change needs to happen, take time to explain what will be happening and why, and ask the individual if there is anything that will help ease this process.

Some things that may help:

- Be understanding of the individual's need for predictable routines.
- Do not move items or furniture without discussing it with the individual first.
- Be aware that changes to staff, management structure or systems can cause anxiety – be supportive.
- Use calendars, timetables and planners to support the individual.

Sensory Issues

Autistic people experience the world differently: this means that they may be more or less aware of and sensitive to stimuli such as sound, lighting, touch & smells and will react accordingly.

Some things that may help:

- Check with the individual before opening windows or turning heating on.
- Be aware that noisy environments can be distracting, and may make it difficult for the individual to focus on tasks or conversations.
- Fluorescent lighting or flickering lights can be problematic, check with the individual
- Keep the environment free of clutter and distractions where possible.
- Be aware that sudden loud noises such as fire alarms can be distressing.



Autistic Individuals can be trusted and supportive coworkers. Offering support and understanding can greatly improve their experience of the workplace.