

This list is by no means exhaustive, but it is hoped to enhance the understanding of employers and colleagues with regard to people on the Autistic Spectrum.

Autistic individuals have much to offer to society, and it is a great loss for everybody when we are denied to contribute our skills and energy. The fact that the majority of Autistic adults are currently not in paid employment is not just a disgrace, but a waste of much potential. Those of us who do have a job, often experience a huge amount of unnecessary stress or are stuck with tasks far below our abilities.

With the rise in diagnosis of autism and other developmental disorders, there will be an increasing need for Autistic adults to share their insight and expertise on a professional level, be it as teachers, lecturers, LSAs, Speech & Language Therapists, Occupational Therapists, Educational Psychologists or such like.

We need to get rid of the stigma and false belief that Autistic people lack empathy and are no good in professional interaction with clients. This is simply not true. Many Autistic people have much greater empathy with their fellows on the Spectrum than non-Autistic people could ever develop, and knowing what it feels like to be Autistic, we are much better placed to educate the public about it, be it through written materials, workshops, lectures or teaching by example.

To sum up, Autistic people need to be given the chance to contribute our expertise to society and to play an active part in strengthening our economy.

## Autism Asperger Syndrome

### Advice for Employers and Colleagues

For information on Autistic collective  
advocacy / autism awareness training contact

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Autistic people make up an estimated 1% of the population, (Brugha, 2009). We are particularly prone to difficulties gaining and sustaining employment despite high levels of commitment and particular skills. Since diagnosis for Autistic people without Learning Disability has only recently been developed in Scotland, many Autistic adults over the age of 30 will not have a formal diagnosis, but may have read enough on the subject to know that they fit the criteria.

(Note we use the term 'Autistic' to refer to all, including people with Asperger's Syndrome).

For employers recruiting staff it is important to note the following points:

- Don't rely too heavily on the usual, formal interviews when selecting employees, but instead pay more attention to references, "skills in action", trial periods etc.
- Avoid hypothetical questions, such as "What would you do if...", Autistic people can find it difficult to visualise what they haven't yet experienced.
- Remember that our non-verbal communication or body language can appear idiosyncratic, or open to misinterpretation, to non-autistic people, just as that of non-autistic people can appear to us.
- Make job descriptions very specific. Include things which other people might take for granted, for example: "Contribute work-related issues to staff meetings" or "At the end of the day, wipe the dirt off the tools you have used and put them in their place in the garden shed."

In your daily contact with Autistic employees/colleagues:

- Keep instructions clear and don't use sarcasm. Say what is what and check that it has been understood correctly. Make sure that general announcements don't bypass the Autistic employee, as is easily the case, but check that they know it is meant for them, too.
- Decision making with no notice can be difficult for some, as can planning but with clear guidelines and an agreed structure these difficulties can be minimised or overcome.
- Be prepared to make adjustments. Many Autistic people can experience sensory overload and need a calm, uncluttered and well organised environment, which might include softer lighting, well maintained heating systems and good ventilation or a quiet place on the premises where people can relax in between stressful activities. This may, in fact, benefit all employees.
- Allow for alternative settings. There are often several ways of getting the same job done, and performance can rise dramatically if limiting factors are taken out of the equation.
- Anecdotal evidence suggests that some Autistic people work better outside normal working hours, for example at night.
- Check for individual strengths and needs. Many Autistic people have great organisational skills, as they like to keep order. We can often spot detail much quicker than other people who are more focussed on the whole picture. Perseverance is another asset many Autistic people can offer, as well as great depth in areas of specific interest. We also often have a highly developed sense of fairness that can appear 'picky' if misunderstood.

- Keep expectations relevant. Don't insist that we do what appears pointless to us, simply because everybody else is doing it. This would include all aspects of socialising, small talk, dressing in certain ways, eating in certain places or get-togethers outside the workplace.
- Be pro-active by creating an ethos of tolerance and understanding. Invest some time to explain to all members of staff issues for potential misunderstandings and frictions, and sort out grievances as soon as they occur, listening to both sides and not assuming that the majority is inevitably right. Bullying is experienced in school, social situations and the workplace by many Autistic people throughout their lives. Managers should be aware of this and be prepared to actively intervene when necessary.
- Although sometimes we may appear to interact well in the workplace, this is because structured, semi-formal interactions, sharing the common goal of the work in hand are easier for us. Unstructured social interactions, such as after-work socialising when peoples' behaviour is much more unpredictable, can be more difficult for us, and may seem terrifying. But please remember that just because we are uncomfortable – sometimes extremely uncomfortable – with social interaction, this does not mean that we are not team players and that leaving invitations open and remembering to include us even if we often refuse invitations is welcome: sometimes these can be taken up and enjoyed even if seemingly at a distance.