

Accommodations & Safety for Autistic Employees



Employers often have concerns related hiring people with disabilities, including about accommodations and safety. The autism spectrum encompasses a wide range of characteristics, symptoms, and abilities. Autistic employees make companies more diverse and can contribute to innovation through their ability to think differently and spark creativity. This guide provides resources for answering questions your industry partner may have related to hiring an autistic student.

Accommodations

The needs of autistic individuals can be accommodated in many ways and will vary by situation. Share any accommodations that you made that your student found helpful. Remind your industry partner that the best way to learn a person's needs is to ask.

Workplace Distractions

A workspace can be filled with distractions that can cause sensory overload and interfere with an autistic person's ability to focus. To help lessen distractions:

- Replace fluorescent lights with LEDs to reduce humming and/or flickering
- Offer sunglasses or tinted glasses
- Provide a quiet, low-traffic workspace that is free of unnecessary clutter
- Allow noise-cancelling headsets, a white noise machine, or music
- Install cubicle doors/shades or room dividers
- Ask co-workers to avoid wearing perfumes or using strongly scented toiletries
- Use low-odor cleaning products, or provide a personal or a room air cleaner

Flexibility

Allow flexibility to develop the employee's own way of organizing their workspace and doing a task. (Creative solutions can result, that may potentially benefit others as well.)

Stress Management

Stressors vary for each autistic individual. Providing stress mitigators can allow them to refocus and recalibrate.

- Provide a rest area/safe space to go for stress respite (e.g., private room)
- Be sensitive to impactful changes (e.g., last minute scheduling, agenda changes)
- Give advance warning of any changes in routines or duties
- Provide an alternative form of communication if needed, such as email, instant messaging, or text messaging rather than conversational
- Allow a written response in lieu of verbal response to questions

Safety

Many of the things industry already does for employee safety will benefit autistic people, such as equipment operation procedures, conducting safety training, and having visual indicators. When speaking with your industry partner, assure that safety precautions can be easily implemented for autistic individuals.

Prepare for Safety

- **Explain the rules.** People with autism like structure. Ensure there is a clear understanding of what their task is, how to do it safely, and enforce by repetition.
- **Determine best communication.** To prepare for an emergency, it is critical to understand how the individual responds in high stress situations. Work with the individual to decide how you will communicate an emergency.
- **Clear path towards safe location.** Ensure the individual understands what they are expected to do in each emergency. Autistic individuals may have difficulties communicating when stressed, so it's important to rehearse the exit plan.

Partner for Safety

- **Buddy system.** Use a buddy system in emergencies to ensure everyone's safety.
- **Mobile devices.** Send emergency alerts to cell phones and/or dedicated pagers. This can efficiently inform all employees of dangerous situations.

Additional Resources

- Autism @ Work Playbook - https://disabilityin.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Autism_At_Work_Playbook_Final_02112019.pdf (<https://tinyurl.com/aaAutismAtWork>)
- Autism Speaks Workplace Toolkit - <https://www.autismspeaks.org/sites/default/files/2018-08/Employment%20Tool%20Kit.pdf> (<https://tinyurl.com/aaAutismEmployment>)
- Organization for Autism Research: Understanding Autism - An Employer's Guide - <https://researchautism.org/resources/understanding-autism-an-employers-guide>



National Technical Institute for the Deaf

Developed in conjunction with DeafTEC, part of the Rochester Institute of Technology: <https://deaftec.org>



For more accessibility resources like this, please visit the AccessATE website at <http://accessate.net>

AccessATE is funded by the National Science Foundation under DUE#1836721. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.