

Common Autistic Communication Needs and Strategies

These are things that might help you in the workplace or in educational settings. Don't be afraid to ask for adjustments and accommodations.

Normally educational settings will arrange for meetings to discuss Individual Education Plans (IEPs), and/or disability needs for students.

Many corporate settings have an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (ED & I) policy and/or a network leader. A Workplace Needs Assessment (WNA) may be carried out.

The Equality Act (2010) advocates for reasonable adjustments for workers with disabilities or health conditions. Autism, ADHD, dyslexia and dyspraxia all fall under disability.

Below are some things for you and your workplace or educational setting to consider:

Clear Expectations

- Specific plans for meetings with details about time, place, those who will be present and their roles, along with what it to be discussed and any relevant diagrams, drawings etc.
- Meeting agendas handing out in advance and adhered to
- A clear 'yes' or 'no' in response to questions or 'I don't know, but I will get back to you (insert timescale)'
- Reading materials, questions, and discussion topics being provided in advance of a panel, interview, or other high-stress public event
- Step-by-step, detailed instructions on how to complete a task
- Specific, measurable outcomes or goals, framed in straightforward language

- Minutes to be taken for every meeting, including action points and those responsible
- The use of closed captions in Google Meet.

Explicit Messaging

- Not assuming that people can use facial expression, tone of voice, posture, breathing etc. as indicators of emotional response
- Giving direct explanations that do not require the recipient to translate or infer the message
- Communicating decisions, changes and exceptions explicitly and timeously
- Recognition and respect of boundaries, if a person is unable to respond immediately.
- Not judging people if they fail to read between the lines. Apologize and restate your message in a clear, straightforward fashion
- Using clarifying questions: 'What would you like me to do about this?'
- Avoid jargon, business-speak, buzz words or ambiguous words or phrases

Reduced Sensory/ Activity Load

- Having no expectation of eye contact, particularly during intense discussions or conversations
- Not insisting that video is turned on in Teams meetings
- Allowing people the opportunity to express opinions and suggestions via text, email, messaging or handwritten note rather than expecting an immediate spoken response
- Giving people time to respond to discussions and encouraging responses after the meeting

- Providing quiet spaces for people to use after face-to-face meetings
- Being aware of background noises (other people, electrical items) as these can cause auditory processing difficulties for some people
- Providing non-complex tasks that can be switched to after hyperfocus or overload
- Normalizing headphones, ear defenders, ear plugs, sunglasses etc. to support sensory regulation
- Making available assistive technology, such as speech-to-text software, time management applications and access to an ergonomic keyboard and mouse

Other Accommodations and Adjustments

- Building in comfort breaks and lunch breaks. Working straight through without these can cause overwhelm, serious discomfort and drops in energy levels
- Giving people an option to have short statements linked to names, indicating needs or information that people might wish to share, for example: 'Sarah wants you to know that she is autistic. She might appear blunt at times to others and is a black and white thinker. She is very creative and a problem-solver. She needs clear instructions and prefers to have processing time and to respond in writing.'
- Training in etiquette for Teams meetings regarding emoticons, hands ups, spoken word and text availability
- Use of assistive technology: screenreaders, Dragon, Otter.ai, closed captions on Google Meet
- Body doubling/ work buddies to help people stay on task