



Employment Tool Kit





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About this Tool Kit

This Tool Kit is designed for autistic job seekers, those who have employment aspirations and their support teams who will assist them in the employment process. It provides tools and tips for planning and preparing for employment, including an overview of career options, resume and interview advice, disclosure and accommodation requests and the legal rights afforded those with disabilities.

The original version was released in 2013 with a comprehensive review and update in 2023 by a diverse team of Autism Speaks staff, Autism Speaks Community Advisory Council and outside contributors that included autistic adults, human resource professionals, job coaches, vocational rehabilitation staff, business leaders, academic experts and caregivers of autistic adults.

Acknowledgments

Autism Speaks would like to extend an extra special thanks to the following who contributed to this tool kit:

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Amy Gravino, Self-advocate and relationship coach at Rutgers University (NJ), media personality and international speaker

Ilene Lainer, Parent and former executive director, NEXT for AUTISM

Jan Pilarski, Parent and co-founder and chief executive officer, Green Bridge Growers

William Andrew Rose, Self-advocate and author

Michelle Rubin, Parent and founder, Autism After 21

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Chris Tidmarsh, Self-advocate and co-founder, Green Bridge Growers

Lydia Wayman, Self-advocate and author

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Introduction

Employment plays an important role in adulthood. It leads to greater ***financial independence***, higher self-esteem and higher rates of participation in the community. These are all known to lead to better health and increased life expectancy. Through employment you can find out more about your interests, discover new ones, explore career options and meet new people.

The goal of this guide is to walk you through the steps to get a job. You will find information to help with the following: figuring out what you want and can do, creating a resume and cover letter, searching for jobs, submitting a job application, interviewing and sending a thank-you note. It will also teach you about ***self-advocacy***, including ***accommodations***, ***disclosure*** and your ***employment rights***.

Throughout, you will read stories from successful autistic adults in various roles and at various stages in their careers. You will also hear from employers and parents who share job tips and advice.

Our Employment Tool Kit was developed by autistic adults, parents, business leaders, and academic experts dedicated to increasing the employment rate of autistic adults. The process began with the Autism Speaks Employment Think Tank in June 2012. For a history, read the [Employment Think Tank Executive Summary](#).

Although this is geared towards you, we know that families, transition coordinators, job coaches and vocational rehabilitation staff, human resources departments, hiring managers, business leaders and anyone helping someone with autism find employment will also find this resource helpful.

NOTE: The ***bold, italicized words*** within sentences in this guide are terms that you may hear often when learning about employment. If you click on one of these words, you'll see its definition. There's also a complete Glossary of all terms at the end.



EMPLOYMENT TOOL KIT WORKBOOK: Throughout this guide you will see suggested **Workbook activities** to help you in your employment search.

Where do you start?

Remember when you were little and someone asked, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” Or when you had career day in school? Maybe you went in dressed as an astronaut, or maybe your classmates’ parents came in and explained their job to you. The point is: you have probably been thinking about employment longer than you realize. Now it’s time to think about what’s next.

Pre-employment

Adolescents in transition planning

If you are the caregiver of an autistic child going through transition planning, which is required by age 16, ask your school about pre-vocational services. These services include vocational assessments conducted to understand your child’s interests by exposure to different careers and to document skills, abilities and interests. These services also provide your child with knowledge about workplace etiquette and social skills needed on the job. Your child can also volunteer or intern to gain more experience about the career that they are interested in pursuing. It is also important that your child has access to training in self-advocacy.

Adults with low to moderate supports needs

Consider getting help from an **employment agency** specializing in those with disabilities. Visit the Employment section of the [Autism Speaks Resource Guide](#). From there, enter your zip code to view a list of employment service providers in your area. You can also contact your local **Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)** agency, which provides employment assistance to individuals with disabilities, including autism. They offer services like career counseling, job training, and job placement support. Click [here](#) to find the office in your state.

You can also look for **job coaches** or employment specialists who work with individuals with autism to develop job skills, navigate the job search process, and provide on-the-job support. They can help with resume writing, interview preparation, and job matching.

Joining job clubs or support groups for individuals with autism can also provide valuable networking opportunities, job leads, and support from peers who have similar experiences.

These groups may be facilitated by professionals or run by community organizations.

Adults with high supports needs

Seek support from specialized disability service providers that offer comprehensive vocational training, career counseling, and job placement services for individuals with autism, including from

Supported Employment Programs

These programs are designed to assist individuals with significant support needs, including autism, in finding and maintaining employment. They typically provide ongoing, intensive support both during the job search process and in the workplace. Supported employment programs often offer job coaches, on-the-job training, and ongoing support for the employee and the employer.

Disability Service Providers

Connect with organizations that specialize in providing employment services for individuals with disabilities. These providers often have a range of supports available, including vocational assessments, job training, job placement assistance, and ongoing support.



WORKBOOK ACTIVITY: Service providers

Make a list of service providers in your area. Include their contact information. Reach out to them if you are interested in a supported employment provider.

Build a support network

Whenever you decide employment is in your future, it is a good idea to start building a personal support network. It is never too early to do this. Think about the people who know you best, like your family, therapists or counselors, former teachers or people you know in careers that interest you. You want to have a few trusted people you can reach out to about your employment aspirations and who in turn will give you feedback. Reach out to them now, let them know you are job seeking and ask if it is ok if you get in touch to ask for advice or guidance. You should reach out to these people again after you find a job to let them know where you are working and then periodically to check-in. Eventually you may reach out to them again if you want to switch jobs, or they may reach out to you if they want to connect someone to you. This is called **networking**. We will discuss this more later.

Success story

If you have a success story, we would love to hear from you. Please email us: WIN@autismspeaks.org.

Meet William Andrew Rose: From fast-food employee to author and speaker



William A. Rose, diagnosed with autism at the age of 2, authored "Amazing Grace, Amazing Gifts: Autism and the Gifts God Granted Along Our Journey" in 2021. His goal is to continue writing books, design logos for companies and create personalized emojis for individuals. His dream job would be to work as a specialist at the Apple store. Here, he shares a bit of his journey and his advice for autistic job seekers.

Never give up

Be consistent when applying for employment and never give up on your dreams until they come to fruition. We are some of the best workers in any industry.

The owner of a fast-food chain did not want to hire me because I was disabled, even though his employees wanted to hire me. I would ask weekly if they were going to hire me; I said I would work the later shift and come in when they were short staffed. Eventually, I was hired at a different location where I worked the front counter.

Find and use supports

I struggled with stuttering at a young age but overcame it by taking my time when I talked. I sometimes used instructions or scripts printed on a small, laminated piece of paper if I needed it when a customer was ordering, which was created for me by one of the managers at the previous fast food chain location. He was a kind, caring and compassionate individual.

Volunteer and get involved

I am appreciative for the opportunity I had as an intern at my church. It was a rewarding experience to be able to collaborate on various projects and provide assistance in their graphic design department.

I am also a member of my local chapter of Toastmasters International, the non-profit dedicated to teaching life skills through public speaking. I meet every Wednesday evening with fellow Toastmasters to time the Table Topics speakers, formal speeches and the evaluations. On some occasions, I even speak before the members.

When I am not working or creating, I serve on the Junior Board of Directors at Unicorn Children's Foundation, a nonprofit dedicated to creating cradle-to-career pathways for kids and young adults with developmental or learning disabilities.

Success story

Meet Scott Rubin, and his mother Michelle, founder of Autism after 21



Necessity was the mother of invention for Michelle Rubin. She knew her teenage autistic son Scott was not college-bound. But she knew he would contribute to his community and live a productive life. So in high school she started building his resume with all his activities. As a result, today Scott is in his thirties, has a decade of work experience behind him and is looking to move out on his own. Along the way, Michelle built Autism After 21, to help other autistic young adults transition to employment. Autism Speaks awarded the organization two grants for its efforts, including most recently in 2019 for its SOAR program. Michelle describes their employment journeys here.

Building a resume

I began building a resume for my son Scott, who was born with autism spectrum disorder, when he was in high school. I knew he was not college-bound. So I started preparing him for a future in employment. I chronicled everything from classes, sports, Special Olympics, awards, work training, and even computer programs he knew to use. For families of autistic students still in high school, my advice is to start building a resume now by volunteering and becoming a part of clubs or organizations.



Based on our experience, I founded the non-profit Autism After 21 when Scott was 18 to provide education, mentorship, advocacy, employment and social opportunities to other young adults with autism spectrum disorder. Our signature program SOAR – Summer Opportunity for Adult Readiness – is a 12-day, residential, job-readiness program held on college campuses. Our curriculum focuses on pre-employment training, career exploration, self-advocacy training, independent living, financial management, and social skills.

Scott's employment journey

Scott's first job was with a neighbor's business that focuses on reusable plastic tags used in retail. I asked him if there was anything in their process that Scott could possibly do. I went and visited the plant and we found job tasks that were a fit. Scott now works there part-time.

In 2018, a friend who does marketing and PR for a local restaurant here in Florida, Rocco's Tacos, told me about the possibility of an opening for Scott. He took a resume that I helped him write, he presented it to the chef and manager at the interview and he got a job as a dishwasher.

But he is more than that. Scott has taken it upon himself to fill some tasks on his own after seeing a need, including taking out trash and restocking dishes for the chef and bartenders.

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Scott likes to be helpful. His ability to figure out what someone in the restaurant needs that he can do makes him proud and feel like he's part of the team, like when he can refill glasses for the bartender, dishes for the chef etc. The chef reports he will turn around and Scott will have emptied his trash without him even seeing Scott do it. He just does it without being asked.

Supports

My experience has been supports are needed in the beginning, especially finding the businesses who are willing to hire. We went to Vail for the summer and were able to find a restaurant that was willing to give Scott a chance even though they had never hired anyone with a disability before. He successfully worked there for seven weeks.

Resume writing for a young man of Scott's academic ability must be done with assistance from others. Job coaching in a new position can make or break the success and longevity, also gives the employer some confidence. Employers can be hesitant to bring someone into the workplace when they have no experience with adults on the spectrum. Assuring them they have supports really helps. Training staff what to expect so natural supports can develop is vital.

The job interviews can be difficult. Scott's speech can be difficult to understand if you don't know him. So I facilitated his job interviews. He also had a job coach from med waiver at a previous restaurant job prior to the one at Rocco's. He was able to transfer those skills to Rocco's without a job coach. He went in on his own, got trained and has been successful ever since. Besides typical onboarding paperwork, Scott had training for the automated dish system from another staff member. It helps that he maintains the same schedule every week.

Self-advocacy

Scott takes great pride in commuting to work independently. He has mastered using his bike and public transportation to access his jobs. He can stay home alone and watch the dog. Currently he is asking for an apartment, and I am trying to figure that out. Given the diagnosis of moderate-severe autism over 25 years ago we never dreamt Scott would be living such an independent life.

What Job is Right For You

Is there something you have always dreamed of doing? Can you realistically do it and get paid for it? Do you have unique skills? Are they suited for a certain job? What are your interests? Are you looking for a job related to your interests, or are you looking for a job that can provide you the resources – like time and money – to pursue your interests? What if you have no idea what you want to do or what you are good at? It is a good idea to ask yourself these questions, self-reflect and do some research.

Assess your strengths and interests

Taking a **career assessment** can help you choose the direction of your job search. The U.S. Department of Labor [O*Net Career Exploration Tools](#) is one place to start. It has several self-directed career exploration and assessment tools to help job seekers consider and plan career options, preparation, and transitions more effectively. The [American Library Association](#) and some popular job posting websites like [Indeed](#), also lists several assessments online, including ones that help determine your personality and figure out what values you want most in a job.

If you are enrolled with your local Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) office, you should also request an assessment from your counselor. To talk to someone about enrolling in VR services, [click here](#) to find the office in your state.

WORKBOOK ACTIVITY: Career assessments

Document the type of career assessments that you have participated in and a summary of the results.

Jobs to consider

A study by the National Center for Education Research (NCER) identified jobs that individuals with autism have successfully held after high school. The jobs spanned across all industries and function. Take a look at some of the more common jobs. By no means is this an exhaustive list of options available to autistic adults. But it could help you start thinking about what job interests you.

- Food preparation and services
- Sales
- Office and administrative support
- Personal care and services
- Transportation
- Building and ground maintenance
- Production
- Education
- Computer, mathematical, architecture, engineering and science

Source: [Newman, L., et al. The Post-High School Outcomes of Young Adults with Disabilities up to 8 Years After High School. A Report from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 \(NLTS2\)](#)

[CareerOneStop](#), sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, is a great place to explore careers. Check out their [video library](#) of hundreds of different careers. Videos include details such as tasks, work settings, education needed, and more.

Industry Focus: STEM

STEM stands for the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Autism Speaks helped fund a national study entitled “STEM Participation Among College Students with an Autism Spectrum Disorder,” which was published online in November of 2012 in the [Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders](#).

Co-author Paul Shattuck, PhD, senior fellow at Mathematica and founding leader of the AJ Drexel Autism Institute's interdisciplinary research program on Life Course Outcomes and the National Autism Data Center, confirmed that individuals with ASD indeed gravitate toward STEM majors in college. In fact, students with autism are significantly more likely to declare a STEM major in college than their peers with or without disabilities.

“STEM careers are touted as being important for increasing both national economic competitiveness and individual career earning power,” according to Dr. Shattuck. “If popular stereotypes are accurate and college-bound youth with autism gravitate toward STEM majors, then this has the potential to be a silver lining story for a group where gloomy predictions about outcomes in adulthood are more the norm.”

One theory for why this may be suggests that people with autism are very good at systemizing, which includes analysis and understanding of rule-based systems, and at looking for patterns. Another good reason to explore jobs in the STEM fields is the growth of the digital economy is dependent on these jobs. It is estimated that during the next decade in the U.S., STEM occupations are expected to increase more than two times the rate of all other occupations. Some of the more popular STEM occupations are: information security analyst, software developer, software quality assurance tester, and computer and information research scientists.

The job market

It is important to understand what jobs are available now and what job are expected to be available in the future. One helpful resource is the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics [Occupational Outlook Handbook](#) where you can search for occupations by their average salary, entry-level education required, available on-the-job training, and the number of new jobs expected to be created. You can check out the [fastest growing jobs over the next ten years](#) and the median salary for each.

Get some experience

Whether you know exactly what you want to do or have no idea, consider some introductory ways to get some hands-on experience in a work setting. Learning about work – the work environment, the social norms among coworkers and time management – can set you up for eventual job placement success. It can also help you build your support network.

Volunteering

Volunteering is a great way to learn about your interests and abilities and explore careers. There are many organizations that offer volunteer opportunities where you are not paid. Do not pass up a chance for work experience, as you will learn from all types of opportunities. Even learning that you do not enjoy a particular type of work is information that will lead you to the right career path.

For more information on volunteering and to find volunteer opportunities in your area, visit these websites:

[Volunteers of America](#)

[Volunteer Match](#)

Note: Many states have their own volunteer agencies. Google your state and see what you find.

Internships

A paid or unpaid **internship** is another way for you to learn vocational skills and gain valuable work experience. Many schools assist students in finding internship opportunities. Some internships can offer you college credit for your work.

Project SEARCH offers a one-year, business-led Transition-to-Work internship for young people with significant support needs their last year of high school or who have just completed high school. It involves a combination of classroom instruction, career exploration, and hands-on training through internships in various job roles within a host business. The goal of Project SEARCH is to equip participants with the skills to secure employment in a competitive job market.

Apprenticeships

An **apprenticeship** is a combination of on-the-job training in which workers learn the practical and theoretical aspects of a highly skilled occupation or trade from experts in the field. Apprenticeships can teach you skills for a trade that is in high demand in the job market. This may make it easier for you to find a job. Visit the U.S. Department of Labor's [Apprenticeship.gov](#) to connect to employers and education partners with resources and opportunities.

TIP: Always make sure that you get a **recommendation letter** from your supervisor when you volunteer, intern or apprentice anywhere. It should be a formal, written letter, preferably in digital format, that should include where you worked, for how long and some of your responsibilities. They should include their contact information also. You can share this with potential employers.



WORKBOOK ACTIVITY: Jobs to consider

Identify jobs that match your skills and interests.
Include your dream jobs.

Company Spotlight:

Aspiritech, Occupational and Vocational Training for Software Testers

Occupational and vocational training can take many forms, from pre-employment activities to on-the-job coaching. At Aspiritech, a not-for-profit near Chicago, Ill., we provide training and employment for those adults who consider themselves to have high-functioning autism or were diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome.

Our clients range in size from Fortune 500 companies (Goldman Sachs, Aon, Abbvie and JP Morgan) to startups, the TSA and large private companies (Empire, Medline and Bose). We provide a number of end-to-end QA project services including: manual and automated testing, data analysis and validation and accessibility WCAG/508 compliance testing.

Our training covers both the technical skills of software testing, and the soft skills needed to succeed in the workplace. The initial one- to two-week classroom style training period, which is provided at no cost, covers the basics of software testing and is designed to be accessible to individuals on the spectrum who possess a moderate level of computer proficiency (programming skills are not required). It is hands-on and avoids abstract lessons to meet the needs of trainees with challenges in auditory processing and a more literal sense of language. This training period can last anywhere from a couple weeks to a couple months, depending on the needs, pace, and availability of the trainee.

In addition to learning software testing/data validation and 508/WCAG accessibility testing skills, the initial training serves as an evaluation period and opportunity for trainees to learn if software testing is work that they can focus on and enjoy. Those who successfully complete their training are invited to work for Aspiritech as paid software test engineers along with our 125 other employees of which 90% are on the spectrum, including most of our management team. While working at Aspiritech, employees continually undergo further training, developing more advanced technical skills.

Soft skills are also taught through frequent team-building activities, job coaching, social skill groups and regular feedback. Some specific areas addressed include accepting constructive criticism, asking for help, appropriate topics of workplace conversation, and e-mail etiquette. The result: employee surveys and parent reports suggest increased self-esteem and self-determination among our employees.

Employment Models and Settings

Employment models

There are several employment models for you to explore. Options can range from competitive employment to starting your own business. This section will help you determine which model works best for you.

Competitive employment

Competitive employment is full-time or part-time work in a business that pays at or above minimum wage, sometimes with benefits (including health insurance and retirement savings plans, among others) the same as every other employee. You are independent in your job and do not require or want employment supports.

Supported employment

Supported employment is a service that can help you gain competitive employment in integrated work settings, and then provide ongoing support services to help you maintain your employment. Examples of supported employment supports for autistic people are: job coaches, co-workers, business supervisors, and mentors.

To experience personal satisfaction and quality of life, you must be given the opportunity and support to express your work-setting preferences. You can help manage this process by choosing a service provider, your employment specialist, and the specific support services that you may need to obtain and maintain employment. State VR programs can assist you with the process of identifying and selecting a service provider. They can tell you the level of education and certification of employment specialists, the types of jobs they or their have obtained, their experience working with people with autism, their rate of pay, and their length of employment.

Customized employment

When your job skills and interests are not an exact match for a job but you can perform many of the job requirements, you should consider talking to a potential employer about customizing the job. Customized employment is a flexible process designed to personalize the relationship between you and an employer in a way that meets both of your needs. It is based on a match between your strengths, interests and needs, and an employer's needs. Customized employment uses an individualized approach to employment planning and job development — one person at a time and one employer at a time.

Customized employment can take different forms:

- Task reassignment: Some job tasks of current workers are reassigned and a new job is created, perhaps for you.
- Job carving: An existing job description is adjusted so that it contains select tasks from the original job description.
- Job sharing: Two or more people share the tasks and responsibilities of a job based on each other's strengths.

Self-employment

Starting your own business can be exciting yet challenging. It's important to research other companies that were started by people with disabilities to see what has worked.

The [*Small Business Administration \(SBA\)*](#) has programs to assist individuals with disabilities in *entrepreneurial* initiatives. Among these are programs for starting a business, *financing* a business (with access to *loans* and *grants*) and understanding tax information.

Success Story

Meet Chris Tidmarsh, Green Bridge Growers



Hard work alone is never enough to succeed. Many autistic adults know this well. National data shows that most are unemployed or underemployed, despite having the skill sets and expertise to excel in the workplace. Farmers know this, too. In this country, their long, labor-intensive work is increasingly challenged by climate change, soil erosion, production expenses, and access to capital.

Neither of these facts sit well with 34-year-old Chris Tidmarsh. Autistic by diagnosis and an environmentalist by way of a college degree, he set out to take matters into his own hands, literally. In 2013 he started Green Bridge Growers with his mom, Jan Pilaski.

Their mission: use innovative methods to grow sustainable, fresh produce year-round and create jobs that harness the amazing skills of young adults with autism.

Life as an autistic employee in a traditional workforce

I graduated in 2010 from Hope College (Holland, MI) with degrees in French, chemistry, and environmental studies. The environment has been a passion of mine for a really long time, leading me to study it in college and pursue sustainable agriculture as a career.

After college I took a job as an environmental researcher. I am **visual learner**, and it was hard for me to adapt to everything being done by speaking. For instance, directions were communicated verbally, but I do better when they are through emails or texts. Social skills-related issues led me to leave the position after a few months. After that, I decided it would be a good idea to start my own farm, to employ others like me who are on the autism spectrum and build a business around our strengths.

Life as an entrepreneur

When we toured different farms to research what was possible in our area, aquaponics stood out as a way to grow throughout the entire year. Aquaponics is a soil less method for growing crops where plants and fish grow in tandem. It uses 90% less water than conventional farming and because we grow vertically, we conserve space and can grow more plants. Our fish basically act to fertilize our plants. Their waste is turned into a form of nitrogen the plants use to grow, and the plants clean the water back to the fish.

We received great guidance in small business development from a start-up incubator at the University of Notre Dame. We had the opportunity to prototype our idea in partnership with an agency in our hometown serving those with disabilities called Hannah and Friends. We learned so much by piloting and testing our growing methods and demonstrating the capabilities of those on the autism spectrum in farming.

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Our original prototype greenhouse is 300 square feet. At that location, we also managed a large garden. We are now on five acres and have six employees. We currently have two greenhouses in cultivation totaling 4,500 square feet and are building a new 3,000-square foot greenhouse early next year.

We primarily grow lettuces, herbs, and other specialty greens. In our “high tunnel” greenhouse we grow kale, collards, tomatoes, carrots, eggplant, and basil. In our field we produce beans, sweet corn, potatoes, squashes, pumpkins, and garlic. All of it is grown organically and we take great pride in growing food that’s of the highest quality.

We supply to restaurants, grocery stores, health food stores, early childhood centers, and farmers’ markets. Because we are also very concerned about food access, we deliver weekly produce shares to food pantries and agencies serving people in need. Having a wide range of customers really has helped our business a lot.

As an entrepreneur you realize you can’t do everything yourself. You have to find out what you don’t know and learn your limits. You can bring to your team those who can do what you’re not able to do. I also like to teach and train those who come to work with us so they can grow their own skills. I hope to always keep learning which seems what entrepreneurs should do to do a great job.

Life as a champion of autistic employees

Green Bridge Growers’ name itself tells our story: we are “green” because we are committed to caring for the earth and using the most sustainable methods possible; we are a “bridge” because we are a pathway to employment and training for autistic individuals, and we are “growers” not just of the delicious vegetables we produce, but of the people we train and employ.

Through a combination of both training and employment, we have helped 40 autistic youth and young adults gain skills to prepare them to find employment. We are proud to provide a program in collaboration with our local public school system that specifically provides training in the various tasks required at our farm.

The great thing about operating our farm is that autistic workers with a variety of skill levels can participate. In my experience those on the spectrum can be very attentive to details and want to follow through on tasks to see them to completion. Many of our team and trainees are good problem-solvers and help think about better ways to do a task or project. They often want to learn about what and why they’re doing something.

We also have to be thorough, consistent, and work on a schedule. Our autistic team members have the ability to do that. Most of all, there’s great pride in the work accomplished. Our autistic team members want to benefit the community and are proud to see our product on the shelves of grocery stores or to know that we are helping feed the hungry. Everyone brings their skills to the table and our work gets done. It’s teamwork of the very best kind.

Advice for aspiring autistic entrepreneurs

As an entrepreneur, you will be an ambassador to show what autistic people are capable of. The work you do is important and makes a difference for many, many others.

If you have the chance to employ others with autism, put them in the forefront. Do all you can to help autistic employees grow, learn, and become leaders at what they do.

Be sure whatever you sell or provide the community is of the very highest quality. That will help potential customers get behind your business and support even more the idea of a business that employs autistic individuals.

For more information on navigating employment, check out our [Roadmap to Meaningful Employment for Autistic Adults](#).



WORKBOOK ACTIVITY: Business ideas

Write down business ideas that you thought about starting or would like to start.

Employment Settings

An important consideration in your job search should be your job setting, or where you will work. Some jobs must be performed at an employer's location, like those in restaurants, hospitals, construction and retail stores. Other jobs – mostly those that involve you working on a laptop or other personal computing device – may allow you to work from home, either on a permanent basis, temporarily, or on certain days of the week. In competitive employment models, the employer typically determines the setting for their job and makes sure you agree to it as a condition of your employment.

Below are some common settings to consider as you think about where you can and want to work.

Onsite

Working at an onsite location, like in an office, store, restaurant, healthcare facility, warehouse, construction site, or professional building, among others, used to be the standard in employment. With the increase in other options, this has also become known as “in person” work now. Many employers still require it, and most will specify where jobs are to be performed in job postings. Onsite work requires you to find transportation to the location. We will talk more about transportation later.

Remote

Technology has made it easier for employees to work anywhere they can operate a laptop or other personal computing device and have access to the internet. When the Covid-19 pandemic forced many companies to send their employees home to work for social distancing purposes, many digital tools became popular, like Zoom and Skype for video calls, to make it easier for bosses and employees to communicate with one another. Now some companies are completely remote, or virtual, as some call it, without a headquarters or physical office. Instead, employees work where they want. Most work from home.

Employers still have policies around remote work, including company hours and start and end times, which employees must follow. They also have strict policies around the use of company computers and other technology. Many use Zoom to have meetings and some even require you to be on camera. So it is important to consider your work set up and your personal appearance if you are going to work remotely.

Remote Work:

Tips from an autistic advocate to make sure working from home works for you

by Lydia Wayman

Lydia Wayman is an autistic advocate with a B.S. in education and an M.A. in English and nonfiction writing. She has worked at an autism resource center, mentored youth with disabilities, and spoken at Girl Scout events, parent-led groups, and conferences with her autistic peers. Her work for Autism Speaks includes articles on anxiety and stress, social media, the [Roadmap to Self-Empowerment for Autistic Adults](#) and the [Adult Autism Diagnosis Tool Kit](#), among others.

It seemed like overnight working from home went from a temporary means to social distance during the outbreak of COVID-19 to becoming an acceptable practice for many employers to conduct their business. Everyone from CEOs down to the office assistants have had to adjust. The rules are not always as clear as when working onsite somewhere. But here are some steps you can take to make this new employment set-up work for you.

Manage your time

Just because you are without a boss or coworkers in sight doesn't mean you have to be without a routine. Start by determining what tasks you need to accomplish and when they are due. If necessary, contact your supervisor to make sure you are clear about what is most important to work on. Then, break bigger tasks down into steps and schedule them into your days. Try to leave extra time slots open in case you get behind on a task. This way, you have a plan in place for when things don't go exactly as planned.

A written schedule or visual routine is a good strategy for time management. You can use an app, a daily planner, or a simple checklist with the tasks you need to complete for the day. Many autistic people like to use visual cues to organize information, such as color-coding by task type or days of the week or using pictures alongside a written schedule. For example, you might shade your "break" times in blue or include a picture of a phone next to any scheduled conference calls.

If you prefer a more flexible approach, you can break the project down by setting a goal for the end of each day. Then list the steps you'll need to do to reach that goal.

Organize your workspace

Set up a workspace that works to your advantage. As tempting as it is to lounge in bed or in front of the TV with your laptop, this can make it harder to focus during the day and harder to relax at night. Consider your sensory needs—the type of lighting, noise level and seating that allows you to focus. Choose a place that allows for easy access to any paperwork, tools or other items you need without clutter. If you're having a hard time remembering your new setup, try using trays or bins with clear labels (made using text, color-coding and/or visual cues).

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If your work involves frequent emails, consider setting up your inbox with subfolders and color-coded tags for each sender. You can organize computer documents and files in the same way.

Communicate with coworkers

Technology exists that allows teams to work together across cities, states, countries and continents. Your employer may use a platform or app designed for remote work, such as Basecamp, where team members post announcements, schedules, to-do lists and files. Team meetings may take place over a video- or web-conference platform such as Zoom or Skype. If you are having trouble navigating these platforms, contact your supervisor, your IT department or a savvy co-worker and ask if they can walk you through how to use the most important functions.

Since in-person contact is not possible, you might see an increase in emails, phone calls and video conferences. Leave time for responding to these in your daily schedule. Some of these communication methods may be more difficult for you. Don't be afraid to double-check your understanding following one-to-one emails or phone calls, especially if you were given instructions.

During meetings, consider taking notes, writing down questions or even asking permission to record. If you agree to do or are assigned tasks during the call, you can write them down as a list of action items. Then, you can reach out to the meeting leader, your supervisor or a coworker with your list to confirm or clarify what you will be working on.

Stay Well

Successfully working from home is as much about personal wellness as it is about productivity. As much as possible, keep the parts of your day that don't have to change, like the time you wake up and go to bed, the clothes you wear and mealtimes. Using these as anchor points can give you a sense of normalcy as you fill in the gaps with your new routine.

For many autistic people, work can be socially draining, so home becomes a place of much-needed alone time. In this case, working from home could mean too much isolation. But you can find ways to stay connected to other people once your workday is over—play video games, invite coworkers to a long-distance movie night via Netflix Party or take a walk while staying at least six feet apart.

Make sure you take breaks during the workday for both your body and mind—eat regular meals, get up regularly to stretch or take a short walk, and give your eyes a chance to get away from the screen.

As you develop your routine, check in with yourself regularly. Are you meeting your goals? Are you getting healthy amounts of sleep, food and exercise? Are you keeping in touch with other people? Are your mood and anxiety level manageable? Keep the big picture in mind—that your wellness is key to successfully working from home.

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Hybrid

Hybrid work is a mix of working both onsite and remotely. Typically, employers determine a schedule to have employees work so many days in an office or another onsite location, and so many days remotely. Some companies are flexible and allow the employees to set their schedule. Sometimes companies determine the schedule for their employees.

There are also companies that have a hybrid workforce where certain employees work entirely onsite, like the shipping department of a manufacturer, and others work entirely from home, like a customer service department of a manufacturer. This too is considered a hybrid setting. If you are interested in a job at a company with a hybrid workforce, make sure you understand where the work is expected to be performed.

Your Job Search

Once you have an idea of what kind of job you want, it is time to start your job search. This section will discuss some strategies that should help you.

Networking

"It's not what you know, it's who you know."

One survey done by Performance-based Hiring Learning Systems in conjunction with LinkedIn found **networking** to be the number one job-hunting tool.

A good place to start your job search then is with your personal support network, mentioned in our Where do you start section. Then reach out to neighbors, people in your faith community and friends in your social groups. Tell them what you are looking to do. Ask them if they know of any opportunities and if they could keep you in mind if they hear of any.

If they do share opportunities with you, ask questions to make sure you understand the job and the company. For instance, ask them to explain what the company does in just a few short sentences. Try to find out as much as you can so you can determine if the opportunity is a match for you. You should also ask them who you should contact at the company and how (by phone, by email, or in person). Or ask them for an introduction.

Helpful Resource: ["Soft Skills to Pay the Bills, Section 4: Networking"](#), U.S. Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP)

PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE: **“You Never Know Until You Ask.”**

By Ilene Lainer, Parent and Former Executive Director of NEXT for AUTISM

The vast majority of job seekers find their jobs through a personal contact. However, for young adults with autism who already are faced with social and communication challenges, people often suggest that they seek their job by looking at job postings or responding to online openings. This approach is not as likely to be effective, not only because the impersonal approach is less successful for most people, but also because young adults with autism like you may benefit from a personal connection or the willingness of a friend or a relative to accommodate your needs, such as introducing you in person.

First, determine that kind of job and type of environment in which you would be most likely to succeed.

Then, tell everyone you know – friends, relatives, neighbors, local store owners with whom you have a connection, members of your house of worship, members of clubs or associations to which you belong, or any other person who you know:

“I am good at ‘X’ (data entry, packing boxes, filing, scanning documents, etc.). I am a hard worker who will follow the rules and not spend a lot of time socializing. I always have a smile and am a joy to work with.”

Ask them, “Do you know anyone who owns a business or is responsible for hiring an entry-level position in which I could do ‘X’ in a ‘Y’ kind of environment (quiet, not direct customer contact, outdoors/indoors, etc.)? Could you please help me meet this person? I want to ask if they have an entry level job opening and see if they would be willing to talk with me about it.”



WORKBOOK ACTIVITY: Your network

Make a list of all the people you know who could be helpful in your job search.

Social Networking Sites

Social media websites have become an increasingly effective job search tool. You can use them to create a personal profile, make connections and expand your network. Social media can include text, audio, video, images, podcasts and other multimedia.

Check out our:

[Autism Speaks Employment WINS Facebook group](#)
[Autism Speaks Autism Employment Network LinkedIn group](#)

Other popular ones are:

[LinkedIn](#)
[CareerBuilder](#)
[Indeed](#)
[ZipRecruiter](#)

TIP: *Social media can offer many advantages, but also has many risks. While it can help you connect with others, it can also open you up to bullying and might put you at risk of sharing personal information about you or your disability that you don't want someone to know.*

Protect yourself. Before engaging or connecting with someone, review that person's or organization's activity on a social network. If you are unsure have someone in your network check them out. Be cautious. It is better not to share your personal information than to overshare it.

Here are some helpful tips to protect your online image:

Be careful. Don't post anything on your page, on your friends posts or any public post that you wouldn't want a prospective employer to see. Derogatory comments, revealing photos, foul language and lewd jokes will be viewed as a reflection of your character.

Be discreet. If your network offers the option, consider setting your profile to "private," so that it is viewable only by friends of your choosing. You may want to use the "block comments" feature and prevent your posts from being shared on others pages. Remember, once it is on the internet, it cannot be erased.

Be prepared. Check your profile regularly to see what comments have been posted. Use a search engine to look for online records of yourself to see what is out there about you. If you find information you feel could be detrimental to your candidacy or career, see about getting it removed. In the meantime make sure you have an answer ready to counter or explain anything a prospective employer or coworker finds.

Helpful resource: ["Soft Skills to Pay the Bills: A Word About Social Networking"](#), Department of Labor ODEP.

Researching Companies

Another way to search for a job is to look at companies that are already hiring people with disabilities.

[Fair360 \(formerly DiversityInc\)](#), a leading source of information on diversity management across corporate America, publishes a list of the top companies for people with disabilities, including autism. Companies who make the list must go above and beyond providing accommodations and flexible work schedules. They must also recruit, retain and promote people with disabilities and create an inclusive corporate culture for people with both physical and hidden disabilities like ASD.

[Click here](#) to review a list of companies who make Fair360's Hall of Fame list.

Additionally you can check out [Disability:IN](#), a nonprofit resource for business disability inclusion worldwide, and the list of companies they recognize annually as [corporate leaders in disability integration in the workplace](#).

Other Job Search Resources

These sites offer online job postings by companies looking to hire people with disabilities:

[GettingHired.com](#)
[SimplyHired.com](#)

Note: Remember to consider your transportation options when searching for a job. If you rely on public transportation, you'll need to ensure you can get to and from any job for which you are applying. We discuss more about transportation later in this tool kit.

Cover Letters, Resumes, Applications and Screenings

You found a job that interests you. Now it is time to apply for it.

Resumes

A resume is a summary of your education, your work experience and your skills. It is considered an essential tool for you to have when you are looking for a job. An employer will read it to decide whether you are suitable for the job they have to offer. Regardless of the type of job offered, it should look professional.

Keep in mind, some companies and job posting boards may ask you to submit your resume online and prompt you to submit sections at a time. For instance, you could be asked to fill in a box with your education. You should still have a one-page resume ready to email as an attachment and/or print to bring to an interview.

How to write a basic resume

A basic resume can contain the following sections:

Header: Include your name, address, phone number, email address and links to any employment-related social network accounts, and if applicable, your online portfolio or work-related website. Do not list your social security number or other private information.

Summary: This can be a two- to five-sentence introduction to highlight your skills, interests and the kind of job you want.

Work/volunteer/internship/apprenticeship experience:

For each job, volunteer position, internship or apprenticeship you have held, list your title, your employer, their city and state, the dates you worked or volunteered and your main responsibilities. You should list your experiences in order from most recent to earliest.

Education: List each school you have attended or are attending, your completion date, any degrees or certificates you have received, and any awards or accomplishments you earned at the school.

Skills: List all skills you learned through school, extracurricular programs or courses, and job training. These should include both hard skills, like techniques you know, software you can use, machines you can operate, and soft skills, which are non-technical like organizational skills, teamwork, and problem-solving.



WORKBOOK ACTIVITY: Resume

Start your resume using our basic template.

*Basic resume example:***Janet Chobot**

Little Rock, Arkansas • (123) 456-7891
agardner@email.com

Summary

An exceptionally organized and friendly dental assistant with 3+ years of successful experience working with dental offices and clients.

Professional History**Smith Family Dentistry, Dental Assistant**

July 2017 – Present

- Clean and prepare treatment rooms
- Prepare patient to be seen by for dental treatment
- Answer common patient questions about dental procedures, treatments, and issues

E&H Dental, Office Assistant

August 2015 – July 2017

- Organized client schedules
- Received patients upon arrival
- Handled client billing and paperwork
- By end of work experience, took on key dental assistant roles

Educational History**Little Road Junior College**

August 2012 – June 2014

Certified Dental Assistant Program

Skills

Dental assistant skills include: DANB certification • X-ray certification

- Denture impressions • Calming personality and demeanor • Hygienic
- Minor oral surgery experience

Portfolios, an alternative resume [need graphic example]

Consider putting together a portfolio of your work for potential employers to see. A portfolio is a good way to provide visual evidence of your skills. It could include writing samples, photographs you took, or pictures you created, for example. Or your portfolio can be a video of your work or of you completing a task. Use visual aids, infographics or diagrams to highlight your skills, such as problem-solving, organization, or attention to detail.

Online professional profile

Build an online professional profile using platforms like LinkedIn, which allow you to showcase your experience, skills, and accomplishments. Utilize the “About” or “Summary” section to provide an overview of your background and highlight key strengths and achievements.

References

As you prepare your resume, create a separate list of your references from school and employers. Employers often ask for a list when they are considering you for a job.



WORKBOOK ACTIVITY: References

Create a list of references to share with your potential employers once you secure an interview. You should contact each to ask for their permission to be used as your reference. You should also inform them when a potential employer may be reaching out.

Cover Letters

A cover letter is a letter to your potential employer that serves as a cover to your resume. It is an introduction and is typically brief, about one page. In it, you should identify who you are, why you are applying for the job and what makes you the most qualified candidate for the position. It also should invite the employer to contact you for an interview. You should customize a cover letter for each job you are interested in and to each employer where you intend to send your resume. Like a resume, it should be professional.

How to write a basic cover letter

A cover letter should contain the following:

- Your name and contact information
- The name and address of the person you are writing
- The date (including the day, month, and year)
- The greeting or salutation (Example: Dear ,)
- The body of the letter (2 short paragraphs)
- The closing phrase (Examples: “Sincerely” or “Thank you”)
- Your typed full name

*Basic cover letter example:***SARA CARLSON**

Racine, MI 47234 | H: (555) 555-5555 | example@example.com

March 15, 2019

Your Insurance World

479 Blackburn Drive
Northville, MI 48167

Dear Hiring Manager,

As an experienced Receptionist, the posting for Administrative Assistant with Your Insurance World piqued my interest. When reviewing the job requirements and your website, I was excited to see that my qualifications and personal traits align with your needs and mission.

I bring a set of talents that I believe will be valuable to Your Insurance World. In my Receptionist role, I honed my abilities in data entry and scheduling, providing a solid foundation for Administrative Assistant position. My decision-making, people-centric nature, and eagerness to please have afforded me excellent interpersonal skills.

I am excited to contribute my strengths and proficiency in customer service toward your team efforts. As an extroverted and personable communicator with a proven track record in multi-line phone operation, my focus on building strong professional relationships has been a valuable asset throughout my career.

Please review my resume for a complete collection of my work history and accomplishments. I would like to schedule an interview at your earliest convenience and will contact you next week to check on your availability. I'm hoping to discuss how my personality and work history fit the Administrative Assistant role.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Sara Carlson

How to Send Your Resume and Cover Letter

Proofread

It is critical to proofread your resume and cover letter for any spelling and grammatical mistakes. If either has any mistakes, an employer may immediately disregard it. Use your computer's programs to help you out. Many, like Microsoft Word, have a built-in Editor function that automatically checks for errors and make suggestions. Use these tools. After you have read it and made any corrections and suggested changes, read it again. Also, have a trusted friend or family member read it, too.

Email

If you are emailing your resume and cover letter, it is important to consider the following:

- **File Format:** Since your resume as an attachment to your email, so use a format that most businesses can open. Microsoft Word is the most common professional word processing program.
- **File Name:** Name your resume document appropriately. Using your first name and last name as the document's name will help an employer find the file on their computer. For example, it should be FirstLast.doc.
- **Don't Forget Your Cover Letter:** If sending by email, you still need to send a cover letter. You can include your cover letter document as an attachment, or you can write the cover letter in the body of the email you are sending.
- **Send from a Professional Email Address:** Some of us have email addresses that we use every day that might be too informal. As you continue your job search, consider setting up a professional email to use. For example, firsnamelastname@gmail.com or a variation of your name would be good to use.

Mail

If you are mailing your resume and cover letter, it should be printed on clean, white paper with no tears or wrinkles.

Applications

Most employers will require you to complete an application. It is a document they will use to capture personal information about you, such as your name, your birthday, where they can contact you, where you went to school, your Social Security number so they can pay you, and other items to verify that you are a real person. It may ask you things already on your resume. It is very important to fill it out completely, neatly and accurately.

Ways to Fill Out an Application

There are three ways you could possibly complete a job application:

1. Written on a paper application. Write neatly in pen and return it to the place of business either in person or by mail.
2. Typed on a downloaded application or digital form. After you fill it out, the employer may want you to either print it and return it or email the document back.
3. Completed online where you would submit it electronically.

Where to Find an Application

Online

Applications may be found within a job posting on a job search website such as Indeed. They are also often available on a company's website under their employment section.

If you don't know the company's website, try searching for it on Google. Once you are on the employer's homepage, look carefully to find the employment section. Sometimes they are found on the company information section on its homepage. It might be on the sidebar, at the very bottom of the page, or at the top of page. Some terms to look for are:

- Careers
- Employment opportunities
- Job opportunities
- Join our team
- Open positions
- Job openings
- Corporate info

Once you find the right page, look for the job application. You might be able to download it and save it to your computer, or you may have to complete it directly online.

In Person

You will sometimes be able to get a paper application at a place of business, such as in a store or a restaurant. If you plan to get an application this way, make sure you are dressed in neat, clean clothes and that you have showered and combed your hair. You want to try to make a good first impression.

When you walk into the business, find an employee who is available to talk. You may have to wait if they are dealing with customers. Walk up and politely ask, "Excuse me, I'd like to pick up a job application. Can you please give me two copies, or can I please see your manager?" You should request two copies because if you make a mistake on the first copy, you will still have a second one to use. Make sure you say, "Thank you" before you leave with the applications.

What comes next after you submit a resume, cover letter and application?

After you complete and submit your resume, cover letter and application, you will need to be patient. The company may not respond to you right away, but that does not necessarily mean that you won't get the job.

If you have not gotten confirmation that your application was received, wait at least one week and then you can call or email them.

You could say, "Hello. My name is _____. I recently applied for a position at your company. I am very excited about this job opportunity and was wondering about the status of my application."

Pre-Employment Screening Assessments

Some companies require you to take their Pre-Employment Screening Assessment before you can be called in for an interview and hired. These assessments are online or paper tests. They can ask you to read questions and choose the best response from a selection of answers. They may also

require you to read questions and rate your response using a scale (for example: rate on a scale of 1 to 5). Most of these assessments are not like the math or history tests you may have taken in school. These ask questions to determine your work-related attitude, personality, productivity, social judgment skills, and reliability. There is nothing you can do to prepare or study for them. Most often, these types of questions do not have clear right or wrong answers. So stay calm and answer honestly.

Example of multiple-choice questions

Question: You have noticed that many of your co-workers come to work late and leave early. The supervisor does not seem to be aware of this problem. For two days in a row, you decide to come to work late because you are tired. Your supervisor asks to meet with you, and she is obviously frustrated by your behavior. How should you handle this?

Select an answer from below:

- A. Apologize to your supervisor, but also inform her that your co-workers are not following these rules either.
- B. Apologize to your supervisor and tell her that it will not happen again.
- C. Ask your supervisor to meet with the entire staff.
- D. Quit your job because this situation is not fair at all.

Example of rating scale questions

Rude customers should be avoided. Circle the number that closely matches your answer.

- (5) Strongly Agree
- (4) Agree
- (3) Neither Agree nor Disagree
- (2) Disagree
- (1) Strongly Disagree

The Job Interview

A job interview is a meeting typically with a human resource manager, hiring manager or supervisor. Most employers base their decision to hire on the interview.

The interviewer will ask you a number of questions about your education, work experience, skills, strengths and weaknesses and why you want the job. You will also have the opportunity to ask a few questions about the company, the job position, your potential boss and your potential coworkers. Interviews can take place in-person, typically at the employer's office. But some interviews are done by **video conference** (like Zoom) or by phone.

Sometimes there is more than one interviewer, or multiple interviews arranged back-to-back. You could also have a group interview with other job applicants. The length of an interview can vary depending on the type of job and the person interviewing you.

Before the Interview

Prepare

- Review the job description. Be prepared to talk about how you can do or are qualified to do the job.
- Research information about the company. The best place to start is on their website. Read their About section, News section and their mission statement.
- Prepare a list of references that you can supply if your interviewer asks for them. You should have at least three people who know you through prior work experience, volunteering, school, clubs or community activity.
- Have a clean, professional outfit ready to wear. No matter what kind of job you hope to get or the work environment you will be in, it is very important to look neat, clean, and professional. That means wrinkle-free (ironed) clothes that fit appropriately and appropriate shoes. Unless you are specifically told to wear comfortable, casual clothing, dress to impress.

Below are specifics ways to help you prepare for each type of interview.

In-person Interview

- Before the day of your interview arrives, be sure you have done a test run of where you need to go. Find the best route and how long it will take to get there. Locate the building and entrance. When you set up the interview, be sure to ask if you will need to check-in to enter the property, with building security or at a front desk, and if you will have to show any documents, like your ID. Take this into consideration when determining the total time it will take you to get to the interview.
- Print out two copies of your resume on high-quality white paper.
- Print out two copies of your references on high-quality white paper.
- Prepare a list for yourself of all your personal information (example: your address, phone number, social security number) that you may have trouble remembering. You will want it available in case you need to fill out an application.
- Put your documents in a professional folder, briefcase, day planner, or handbag. Be sure to pack a form of photo identification, like a driver's license or state issued I.D.

Video Conference Interview

- Make sure you have the appropriate video conference platform and that you can use it. Many are web browser based but can also be used on a smart phone. Have a friend or family member send you a test invitation so you can check.
- Make sure you know how to turn the camera on and you can position yourself in the center of it so your full face is seen. Make sure you also know how to turn mute off and turn the volume up.
- Make sure you have a quiet space inside to do the interview. It should be free of all distractions, including pets, noise, and people entering into the camera view. There should also be no distractions on the wall behind you.
- You should also have all other programs closed and notifications turned off so that you are not interrupted.

Phone Interview

- Make sure you have a quiet space, preferably inside, to take the call. It should be free of all distractions, including all noise.
- If you are using a mobile phone, make sure that you have a fully charged battery. You should also have all notifications turned off so that nothing interrupts your call.
- Because you are not on camera you may be inclined to move around. Be mindful of how this could affect your ability to pay attention or lead to distractions. For instance, if you prefer to walk and talk, make sure you are not leaving a quiet space for a noisy one.

Practice

Practice your interviewing skills in advance. Have a friend or support person help you. Have them ask you practice questions. Practice telling your story, your experience, and focusing on your abilities, not your disabilities. Tell them about your strengths. Be proud of your accomplishments and share them. Practice ending the interview by thanking your interviewer and reminding them how to contact you. Consider recording the interview so you can listen or watch to learn from what you did well or where you want to improve your answer.

TIP: Many companies that post jobs openings on websites for people with disabilities or work with your VR agency are well-educated on hiring autistic employees. If you have an interview with such a company, you may consider asking for your interview questions in advance, or for interview accommodations. For instance, if you have multiple interviews with different people, you could ask for a break in between them.

Make a list of 2-3 questions you have about the position, your potential boss and coworkers, and/or the company. It is ok to ask things such as, how long your potential boss has been with the company, what would be the biggest challenge in your role, and what is one of the company's biggest challenges in their industry.



WORKBOOK ACTIVITY: Questions to ask during your interview

Come up with questions to show your interest in the company and your interviewer.

Day of the Interview

Dress for Success

If your interview is in a professional setting or a company with a strict dress code, business professional attire is required. Business professional clothes should be well-fitted and may be tailored to fit you specifically.

- Some examples of a professional setting: banking, finance, government, law.
- Some examples of business professional clothing: tailored dresses, slacks, skirts, dark-colored suits, ties, long-sleeve button-down shirts or blouses, blazers. Shoes include: heels, loafers or flats.

If your interview is in a casual setting or if you are an adolescent (younger than 18), business casual attire is acceptable. You are not expected to wear a suit. But it is still better to be over-dressed than under-dressed.

- Some examples of a casual setting: retail, medical or healthcare, industrial or warehouse.
- Some examples of business casual clothing: skirts, slacks, khakis, trousers, blouses, collared shirts, button-down shirts, sport coats, blazers and sweaters. Shoes include: flats, lifestyle sneakers (with leather or canvas), Oxfords, loafers, mules, boots or heels.

TIPS:

- It is ok to ask when you set up the interview about the business setting.
- If you do not have appropriate job interview clothing there may be nonprofit organizations in your community that can help. Try searching "career clothing donations near me" on the Internet.
- Be sure that you shower, brush your teeth, comb your hair neatly, and have your fingernails trimmed. For men without beards, it is a good idea to be cleanly shaven.
- Arrive 15 minutes early. It is a good idea to arrive no sooner than 15 minutes before your interview starts. This will make a good first impression and ensure that you are not late. You can wait outside or in the waiting area if you are too early.

Greeting

Be polite and friendly to any staff you come into contact with. You might need to tell an employee that you are there for an interview so that your interviewer knows you have arrived. Introduce yourself with: *"Hello, my name is _____ and I am here to see (interviewer's name) for an interview."*

Be prepared to begin your interview by greeting your interviewer with a handshake. Reach out your hand as you introduce yourself with: *"Hi, my name is _____. Thank you for seeing me."*

- Your handshake should be firm. Practice this with a friend or family member before the interview. Try practicing making eye contact as you do it. Handshakes should last only 2-3 seconds, then let go.
- You do not have to initiate a handshake if you don't want to or if it makes you too uncomfortable. But if the interviewer reaches out his or her hand to you, you must reach out and shake.

Wait for the interviewer to sit down first, then you can take your seat (unless he/she insists that you sit down first). Once they sit down, you should sit down too.

Hand over a copy of your resume.

Engage in conversation

Sit up straight in your chair and face the interviewer. Try your best to sit still as you talk.

The interviewer will ask you questions about your resume. Even though the answer might be right on the sheet you just gave them, answer each politely and try to add more information. Be ready for follow-up questions. Some questions may be more about getting to know you, and your likes and dislikes, more than they are about your actual work experience.

Ending the interview

The interviewer ends the interview. They may do so by either:

- Asking you if you have any questions. Remember the ones you prepared in advance and if they were not yet previously answered, ask them. Or you can simply say, *"This was a great interview. You already answered all of my questions."*
- Thanking you for coming in.

No matter how the interview went, when it is over you say, *"Thank you for meeting with me."* You can also again express

interest in the job by saying, *"This seems like a really great place to work. I look forward to hearing from you. You can contact me by (my email or my phone number) listed on my resume."*

Prepare to shake hands before you exit the interview.

After the Interview

Within two days after your interview, you should write a thank-you letter or email to your interviewer for meeting with you. Check out career sites like Indeed and CareerBuilder for sample thank you emails.

Next comes the hardest part: waiting. You must wait to hear whether you got the job. This may take time as the company may be interviewing several candidates. After two weeks have passed and you have not heard anything, you can email those who interviewed you once again thanking them for their time and saying that you are still interested in the position. Remind them where they can reach you. Most employers will let you know if you are still being considered or if they decided to go in another direction. If you do not hear back at all, you should continue job searching.

Basic thank-you email example

Subject line: Thanks for meeting with me

Hello [name],

Thanks again for taking the time to meet with me [day]. I enjoyed our conversation about the [position] and appreciated learning more about working with you and the [department].

It sounds like a rewarding role with many opportunities. I think my [qualification] makes me an excellent candidate for the role.

If you have any questions for me or would like my references, please don't hesitate to contact me. I appreciate your consideration and look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you,

[name]

[phone number]

Benefits and Funding

Social Security

Social security is financial protection provided by the federal government to help maintain the basic well-being and protection of citizens. Social Security benefits do not have to be disrupted because you earn a paycheck. The Social Security Administration (SSA) has developed incentives for people with disabilities to work even if they are collecting Social Security benefits. To get a better understanding of how your benefits could be affected, it is very important to sit down with a Social Security disability representative in your area. Call 1-800-772-1213, or [click here](#) and enter your zip code to find the contact information for your local Social Security office.

The SSA's Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) disability programs are the largest federal programs providing assistance to people with disabilities. Only individuals who have disabilities and meet medical criteria may qualify for benefits under either program.

Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) pays benefits to you and certain members of your family if you are "insured," meaning that you worked long enough and paid Social Security taxes. For example, Joe has worked for 20 years at Home Depot. But now, due to his medical needs, he can no longer work. He can receive Social Security Disability Income because he's worked long enough to have paid into the SSDI Fund. He has paid for that insurance.

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) pays benefits to people with disabilities who have limited income and resources. It is designed to help aged, blind, and disabled people who have little or no income. And it provides cash to meet basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter.

As stated above, it is very important to schedule a consultation with a Social Security disability representative in order to understand your specific needs and the benefits you are entitled to receive.

To find out which benefits you might be eligible for and to learn how to apply for them, visit this website:

[**Benefit Eligibility Screening Tool \(BEST\)**](#)

Work Incentives from Social Security

Social Security offers some work incentives that allow you to work and keep your benefits, which may apply to you.

Plan for Achieving Self Support (PASS)

A Plan for Achieving Self Support, also known as PASS, is a plan for your future. Maybe you need to go back to school or you would like to start your own business, but you do not have the money. Whatever your work goal may be, a PASS can help you reach it. A PASS is an SSI work incentive that lets you set aside your money to go to school to get specialized training for a job or to start a business.

A PASS is meant to help you get items, services, or skills you need to reach your goals without losing your SSI benefits. Learn more [here](#).

Impairment-Related Work Expense (IRWE)

The Impairment-Related Work Expense (IRWE) is another work incentive available to individuals who receive SSDI and/or SSI. IRWE allows you to keep more of your Social Security check when you work. IRWE can be used if you have expenses that:

1. Are related to a serious medical condition,
2. Are needed in order for you to work, and
3. Are paid for by you and will not be reimbursed by another source.

Some possible IRWE expenses may include:

- Medications
- Costs for attendant care
- Costs for modifying your vehicle and other items
- Transportation costs (in certain situations)
- Costs for necessary medical devices
- Medical services
- Job coaching expenses that you paid for on your own

Even though you may believe that something would qualify as an Impairment-Related Work Expense, the Social Security Administration may not agree. So it is important to speak with a Social Security representative in order to determine if an expense is eligible under IRWE (making your SSI check higher). For more information about IRWE, visit this website:

[**SSI Spotlight on Impairment-Related Work Expenses**](#)

Ticket to Work

Another program from the SSA is the Ticket to Work program. This support program allows a person with a disability to take a Ticket to purchase support from an approved employment provider as part of the Ticket to Work & Workforce Investment Act.

Organizations that are selected to participate in the Ticket to Work program must provide people with disabilities the opportunity and support to prepare for, obtain and keep jobs that will realistically enable you to achieve independence.

If you are eligible for Social Security disability benefits, you will be called a Ticket Holder. You may assign your Tickets to an Employment Network (EN) of your choice to obtain employment services, vocational rehabilitation services, or other support services necessary to help you become as self-sufficient as possible through work opportunities.

To learn more about the Ticket to Work program, visit this website: [Ticket to Work](#)

Funding Sources for Job Supports

In addition to Social Security incentives, there are other agencies that can help fund job supports you might need to assist you in finding and keeping a job. Listed below are key agencies that provide job developer, job coach, transportation and other necessary supports for some autistic adults.

State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services

VR agencies can give you vocational assessments that lead up to the development of an Individual Plan for Employment (IPE). A variety of employment-related services can be provided under an IPE, including training, counseling, job placement, and supported employment. Services through VR agencies are considered to be successful when you are found to be stable in a job. If you have not done so yet, click [here](#) to find the office in your state.

State Developmental Disability Agencies/Home and Community Based Medicaid Waivers

State and local Developmental Disabilities services operate under a variety of different names across the country. Some states control these services through the supervision of local agencies or they may be managed by a local community service board. Frequently the funding for these services comes through the Home and Community Based Services Waivers (HCBS), which are made available through Medicaid. The requirements for gaining access to these services vary from state to state. Several employment services can be accessed through this funding source and can include supported employment, case management services and counseling and treatment services.

Visit the [Center for Medicaid & Medicare Services \(CMS\)](#) for more information about Medicaid Waivers.

Search for your state Developmental Disability Agency [here](#).

Self-advocacy, Accommodations and Disclosure

Self-Advocacy

Where you work and what job you perform are important choices. When you finally accept a job offer, you will need to start practicing some level of self-advocacy.

Self-advocacy is:

- speaking up for yourself
- asking for what you need
- negotiating for yourself (working with others to reach an agreement that will meet your needs)
- knowing your rights and responsibilities
- using the resources that are available to you
- being able to explain your disability either by the use of written words, pictures or gestures
- learning to ask for help
- identifying any obstacle or difficulty and then seeking out assistance to find resolve

Once you have an understanding of your unique needs and challenges in the workplace, you can make a self-advocacy plan. Consider which accommodations you can implement on your own and which might require permission from your employer. Make sure you consider all of your needs — social and communication, sensory, executive function and movement. Make a plan if you will disclose, what method of communication you will use and what you will say.

Employment Rights

There are a number of important federal laws that protect individuals with disabilities from discrimination in employment and the job application process. These laws and the **recourse** you have if your rights are violated are outlined below.

Americans with Disabilities Act

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 prohibits discrimination based on disability. Under this act,

disability is defined as *“a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity”*. The **ADA** requires employers with 15 or more employees to provide a **reasonable accommodation** for the individual with the disability. A “reasonable accommodation” is defined as any change or adjustment to a job or work environment that permits a qualified applicant or employee with a disability to participate in the job application process, to perform the essential functions of a job, or to enjoy benefits and privileges of employment equal to those enjoyed by employees without disabilities.

Rehabilitation Act of 1973

The Rehabilitation Act is an act of Congress signed into law by President Richard M. Nixon on September 26, 1973. It prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in programs conducted by federal agencies, in programs receiving federal financial assistance, in federal employment, and in the employment practices of federal contractors. Section 504 of the Act (see below) created and extended civil rights protections to people with disabilities. As a direct result of the Rehabilitation Act, many people with disabilities were provided opportunities in education and employment. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was amended in 1978 (to establish independent living centers), 1986 (to enhance support for rehabilitation engineering), 1992 (to ensure consumer choice in career opportunities), and 1998 (to provide federal funds to assist people with disabilities in finding meaningful employment).

Section 503

Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits discrimination and requires employers with federal contracts or subcontracts that exceed \$10,000 to take affirmative action to hire, retain, and promote qualified individuals with disabilities. This law is enforced by the Employment Standards Administration’s Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) within the U.S. Department of Labor.

Section 504

Section 504 states that no qualified individual with a disability in the United States shall be excluded from, denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity that either receives federal

financial assistance or is conducted by any executive agency or the United States Postal Service. Basically, this means all government-funded programs/entities must adhere to this law, meaning they cannot discriminate against an employee with a disability, or a potential employee with a disability.

Enforcing the Laws

The [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission \(EEOC\)](#) enforces laws against workplace discrimination on the basis of an individual's race, color, national origin, religion, sex, disability, and age. The law also protects people from discrimination based on their relationship with a person with a disability (even if they do not themselves have a disability). For example, it is illegal to discriminate against an employee because her husband has a disability. It is illegal to harass an applicant or employee because he or she has a disability, had a disability in the past, or is believed to have a physical or mental impairment that is not transitory (lasting or expected to last six months or less) and minor (even if he or she does not have such an impairment). Harassment can include, for example, offensive remarks about a person's disability. Although the law does not prohibit simple teasing, off-hand comments, or isolated incidents that aren't very serious, harassment is illegal when it is so frequent or severe that it creates a hostile or offensive work environment or when it results in an adverse employment decision (such as the victim being fired or demoted).

Resources if you feel your rights have been violated:

[Filing a charge of discrimination with the EEOC](#)

[U.S. Department of Justice – Civil Rights Division](#)

[National Disability Rights Network](#)

Accommodations

Under [Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#), a reasonable accommodation is a modification or adjustment to a job, the work environment, or the way things are usually done during the hiring process. These modifications enable an individual with a disability to have an equal opportunity not only to get a job, but successfully perform their job tasks to the same extent as people without disabilities.

The ADA requires reasonable accommodations as they relate to three aspects of employment:

- 1) ensuring equal opportunity in the application process;
- 2) enabling a qualified individual with a disability to perform the essential functions of a job; and
- 3) making it possible for an employee with a disability to enjoy equal benefits and privileges of employment.

Many autistic employees require some type of accommodation in their employment. Some of those are easy and inexpensive to implement, while others require a more thoughtful plan. This section offers information on different types of accommodations. It is important to note that job responsibilities can change according to the needs of the business. Accommodations should be considered not only to get a job, but to keep a job.

Reasonable accommodations

• Job Accommodation Network (JAN)

In order to understand all your options for a job accommodation, it is important to speak to someone with experience in understanding and applying accommodations. JAN provides free, confidential technical assistance about job accommodations and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Their website also outlines some accommodation suggestions for individuals with ASD. [Click here to learn more.](#)

• Technology

Smartphones, iPads and other technology offer task management and organizational features that may be utilized to help you function more successfully in the workplace. Additionally, onboard video cameras and add-on software applications provide rich opportunities for you.

For more information on how technology can help you in the workplace, check out these articles and resources:

[Autism Speaks: How Technology Can Help You](#)

[VCU Rehabilitation Research & Training Center](#)

• Universal Design for Accommodations

[Universal Design](#) is defined as, "design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible

by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability.” Examples include: adaptive lighting, visual reminders in hallways and in communications, automatic doors.

Increasingly, employers recognize that universal design is a fundamental condition of good design. If an environment is accessible, usable, and convenient to use, everyone benefits.

Natural Supports

Natural supports are strategies that workers and managers use on a regular basis with all of their colleagues in the workplace, regardless of whether or not they have a disability. This allows you to be treated exactly like everyone else. Natural supports in the workplace are easier to maintain and more cost-effective than more formal interventions such as job coaches, too. Some business leaders who participated in the Autism Speaks Employment Think Tank expressed interest in the idea of using the “manager as job coach,” which would make it natural manager’s responsibility to support employees with ASD. This also helps phase out the job coach, who is best used as a temporary accommodation during times of transition.

Workplace Social Skills

- Use a job coach to help you understand different social signs and cues.
- Review or ask your job coach to review with you conduct policies to understand what is unacceptable behavior.
- Use role-play scenarios with your job coach or trusted friend to demonstrate acceptable behavior in workplace.

Interacting with Coworkers

- Look for a mentor to help you learn how to interact with co-workers.
- Minimize personal conversation, or move personal conversation away from work areas.
- Ask for a job accommodation that is an alternative form of communication if needed between you and your co-workers, such as email, instant messaging, or text messaging rather than conversational.

Communicating Effectively with Supervisors

- Ask for day-to-day guidance and feedback.
- Ask for clear expectations and the consequences of not meeting expectations.
- Ask to establish long term and short-term goals.
- Ask for assigning of priority of tasks.
- Ask for assignment of projects in a systematic and predictable manner.

Communicating in the Workplace

- Ask for advanced notice of meetings, particularly when you may be required to provide information at the meeting.
- Ask if you can provide a written response in lieu of verbal response.
- Ask for advanced notice of meeting topics, particularly when you are required to participate verbally.
- If you need support, ask to bring an advocate to any performance review or disciplinary meetings.

Finding job fulfillment after diagnosis: Lessons from Autism Speaks John Taylor



John Taylor has worked at Autism Speaks since 2011. He is responsible for editing our Resource Guide, contributing to our Tool Kits and Roadmaps, and helping constituents access that information. His path to full-time employment started out bumpy, taking a turn for the better after he received his autism diagnosis at the age of 24. With a better sense of self he found support from a disability employment agency which ultimately led him to his current role. Here, he reflects on how he overcame obstacles, shares challenges he still has, and offers advice to other autistic adults looking for fulfillment in the workplace.

Job Searching: Know yourself and ask for help

A few things caused me difficulties when looking for a full-time job. For one, I was looking for an entry-level job. The catch-22 that many jobseekers face, whether they're autistic or not, is that so many so-called "entry-level" job ads state a minimal number of years of experience is required. But, you can't get that experience. All the other job ads have the same requirements. Job openings for those without experience exist, but it takes a lot more effort to find them. Or, you have to have connections to find them. As they say, "It's not what you know, it's who you know."

After my autism diagnosis, I got help from a New-York-City-based organization, Job Path, that helps people with developmental disabilities find jobs. I had a very competent job coach there who helped me pinpoint my skills, prepare my resume, and practice for my interviews.

Interviewing: Challenges and nerves are normal

Once I found entry-level jobs, my difficulties didn't stop there. I often have trouble making eye contact, especially when I'm physically close to someone, like across their desk during an interview. I also often find it so much easier to concentrate during a conversation without eye contact. By that, I mean focusing on both what I'm saying and what the other person(s) is/are saying. After all, we speak with our mouths, listen with our ears, see with our eyes, and think with our brains. While eyes can convey emotions, they don't do the actual physical speaking and listening. However, in our society, many think that you must make eye contact when communicating with people. People who don't make eye contact are also seen as not being honest. Silly neurotypicals, am I right? I'm sure they talk on the phone without eye contact just fine! I'm also certain that eye contact has no bearing on honesty.

Another thing is my body language. I've always been very fidgety, especially when feeling nervous. But who doesn't feel nervous during a job interview? Besides, it is more unnatural to sit completely still for a long conversation than it is to fidget.

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I've heard other autistic people say that they would prefer to have an alternative to the traditional interview process, like maybe being able to demonstrate their abilities with some sort of test. While I think these options should be open, not only to those with autism, but to everyone, I'm not totally against traditional interviews. I just think interviewers need to be more understanding of people's differences.

Self-advocating: Tips on how to find a job and thrive in the workplace

- Ask for help. Use an employment agency and/or a job coach that specializes in helping those with disabilities.
- Practice answering common job interview questions like, "What are your strengths and weaknesses?" to help you calm down before an interview. This can be with your job coach, a friend, or a family member. Remember though, being nervous is normal.
- Ask for accommodations as soon as you know you need them. I personally find it a lot easier to focus on my work, and not be distracted by things like conversations, by using noise-cancelling headphones to listen to things like music, podcasts, or audiobooks. A pair of noise-cancelling headphones is well-worth the investment if you have sound sensitivities. You can either listen to stuff with them on, or you can just use the noise-cancelling feature by itself. Keep in mind that not all accommodations are appropriate for all work environments. I only occasionally have to speak with coworkers, so listening to stuff on my headphones works for me.
- Many of us thrive on routines. Conversely, we also have trouble with changes in routine. A new job itself is a change in routine. Whatever you used to do during your work hours will probably have to change. Figuring out the best routine could take a bit of trial and error. As you progress in a job, you will probably be given more responsibilities. When this happens, you will have to change your routine. This, once again, is difficult. I think it's a good idea to tell your supervisor how beneficial routines are for you and to ask for time adjusting to any changes to them.
- Schedule periodic check-ins with your supervisor to stay on the same page. I meet once a week with my supervisor because that works for us. Maybe you would want to meet every day or every month, whatever works for your arrangement. Even if it is not the most fun part of your job, it helps you stay on the same page.



WORKPLACE ACTIVITY: Accommodations

Make a list of accommodations that you have relied on in the past in other settings, like school, and some you think may help you in the workplace.

Disclosure

The issue of disclosure for people with ASD and other “invisible” disabilities can be complicated. Many employees with autism fear being judged due to misconceptions and stereotypes associated with their disabilities. It’s always a good idea to discuss this decision first with someone you know well and trust (a family member, friend, or support person). There are different pros and cons to disclosure that you will have to weigh. But ultimately, the decision of whether to disclose your diagnosis is entirely up to you.

Types of disclosure:

- **Nondisclosure:** Generally, there is no obligation to disclose your disability to an employer until the need for reasonable accommodation becomes apparent. Nondisclosure is acceptable if you have ordinary requests to handle typical issues in the workplace that are not barriers related to your disability.

For instance, you don’t need to disclose your disability for things such as asking a supervisor to explain confusing instructions or telling your co-workers that you want to relax on your lunch break by playing a game on your phone, rather than socializing.

- **Soft disclosure:** Many employees will report a barrier they are facing, offer a general description of their condition, explain how their work is negatively impacted and request an accommodation for it. This is soft disclosure.

For example, you could inform your supervisor you are getting headaches working under the fluorescent bulbs in your workspace due to light sensitivity. You can point out it is affecting your work and as such, you request softer light bulbs or different lighting over your workspace.

- **Hard disclosure:** When you know that there is something in the workplace that is preventing you from competing for a job or performing a job well and you need to formally request a reasonable accommodation to assist you, you may need to reveal your diagnosis. You should inform someone who can act upon your request, such as a manager, supervisor, or human resources professional. You should make it known that an adjustment or change at work is needed for a reason related to a medical condition.

In some cases, employers do not need to know the specifics of your diagnosis to implement your accommodation. Some state laws, like California, restrict employers from requesting a diagnosis or asking for detailed medical information. Details about the accommodation may be all that is needed. But under the ADA, employers may be able to insist on knowing the name of the impairment as part of determining whether the employee has a covered disability.

Confidentiality

The ADA requires employers to keep all disability-related information confidential. Employee medical information can only be shared with those who are considered to be on a need-to-know basis.

It is not necessary to tell your co-workers and colleagues about either being autistic or needing accommodations. They may become aware of the accommodations you have, if any (like extra breaks or a flexible starting time), but they are not entitled to know why.



WORKPLACE ACTIVITY: Disclosure considerations

Write down the reasons you may want to disclose your disability and why you may not want to. Share this list with a member of your support network and/or job coach to help you make your decision.

Autism Speaks Workplace Inclusion Now™ (WIN)

Workplace Inclusion Now™ (WIN) is Autism Speaks workforce development program for employers, job seekers and community stakeholders committed to promoting diversity in hiring and creating an inclusive workplace culture in which not just autistic adults, but all employees can thrive. A key component of WIN is online training courses, including several designed in collaboration with Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). Each is designed to raise awareness around differences in thinking and communication styles and to provide strategies and support to building inclusive workplaces.

WIN is a tool to improve your career readiness. It will empower you to bring your best self to your employer, or potential employer. Through WIN courses, you will learn about self-advocacy, disclosure and how to navigate your differences at work. All courses can be taken with a caregiver or trusted person, if needed.

Sign up for our [Navigating your differences in the workplace](#) course.

Navigating her differences:

How Amy Gravino turned her passion into her profession

Amy Gravino is a prominent autism advocate, relationship coach at Rutgers University (NJ), media personality and international speaker. But she didn't start out this way. Early in her career she moved across country to Seattle and took her first office job. It would also be her last. She found it through a temp agency that did not specialize in autism or finding employment for people with ASD. There was no on-site support in place; no one for her to check in with or whom she could ask for help if needed. After a series of miscommunications, she decided to disclose her diagnosis to her coworkers. Shortly after, her supervisors decided they no longer needed a temp. But it wasn't entirely a negative experience. She says it helped her find her purpose and lead her to where she is today.

In 2020, I started a new job as a relationship coach in the Rutgers Center for Adult Autism Services (RCAAS). The timing couldn't have been stranger, as I was there for all of two days before Spring Break, and then a global pandemic happened. Work finally resumed in person in the Fall of last year, and in some ways, it truly feels like I didn't start at the RCAAS until then.

As an autistic adult, I've had more than my share of disappointing and frustrating experiences with employment. Starting a new job in the midst of a pandemic and waiting a year and a half to even meet most of my co-workers was the last thing I could have expected. The prolonged isolation coupled with the trepidation I felt after my previous jobs left me with feelings of such uncertainty, and questions not unlike the ones I used to ask in my elementary school years:

Will I fit in? Will the others like me? Am I going to be able to do what everyone expects me to do?

Returning to the Rutgers campus in September of 2021 felt like the first day of school all over again. The one established relationship I had was with Dr. Christopher Manente, the Executive Director of the RCAAS. We'd met five years earlier at an event outlining the vision for the RCAAS and then again at a panel I spoke on that was organized by Dr. Manente in 2019, forming a connection that would prove more fruitful than I could have imagined.

As a relationship coach, I work one-on-one with the participants in the SCALE (Supporting Community Access through Leisure and Employment) program and the CSP (College Support Program) to help them navigate issues related to friendships, relationships, and sexuality. And while it may seem ideal on paper to have an autistic adult working in an environment that is all about supporting autistic adults, I have still faced challenges adjusting to and understanding the workplace.

Being the only autistic employee at the RCAAS, my role has extended beyond educating the students to my co-workers, to helping them to re-imagine their preconceived biases and ideas about autism. It is an opportunity that I only wish I would have had in previous jobs, where my colleagues' knowledge and understanding of autism and neurodiversity was extremely limited.

But where the desire to have that understanding was nearly absent from my past workplaces, at Rutgers, my colleagues and supervisors are more than eager to listen, to collaborate, and to learn, and it has made all the difference.

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So many autistic adults are still struggling, still fighting to find the job and the workplace environment that is right for them. It took me many years to realize that I need to work in a field and in a position that means something to me, rather than just doing something for a paycheck. When it comes to getting a job, we hear so often that it's who you know, not what you know that counts.

But what I have learned is that the most important person you need to know is yourself—who you are, what you're passionate about, and what you need to be successful. Be that person—the person you are, who no one else can be, and the employers who are paying attention, and who understand the value of having different kinds of minds, will stand up and take notice.

Soft Skills

While every job requires different technical skills and knowledge, success in any field also depends on **soft skills**. These include things like work ethic, teamwork, organization, willingness to learn and creative problem solving. It will be important for you to determine which soft skills are important to do your job, and which skills you need to work on with someone.

The difference between soft skills and hard skills is that hard skills can be defined and measured easily. Examples: how many words per minute you type, your ability to use specific computer programs (like Microsoft Excel) and your writing ability.

Soft skills are more difficult to master because the rules change depending on where you are and the people you are with. For example, it is perfectly acceptable to jump up and down and cheer out loud for a teammate who has just hit a home run on the ball field. But this type of behavior would not be acceptable in an office setting after hearing that a co-worker just developed a great new idea.

As you interact with your co-workers, it's important to know that many people are taught that you don't discuss religion, politics or finances at work. It would be also important to not talk about other personal topics such as race, sexual orientation or certain physical characteristics (including a person's age, height or weight) and even someone else's disability because it could be hurtful or uncomfortable.

There are a number of ways to learn appropriate social skills on the job. One way is to find a **mentor** at your workplace. A mentor is a positive role model who can guide you, inspire you and support you. A mentor can be someone from your place of work, or even a family member or someone from your community. When you become more experienced, you may wish to mentor other new employees.

Transportation: Getting to work

Reliable transportation to and from the job is critical. You will need to work with your family and your supported employment provider to determine the best options for transportation. Transportation can be done privately if you or someone who supports you drives and has a reliable vehicle. Or you could consider **rideshare services**, like Uber or Lyft, which use websites and mobile apps to match people needing a ride with a local driver willing to take them where they need to go for a fee. Additionally, you can consider public transportation options such as buses, trains or cab services. Safety should always be considered when making these choices.

Online Transportation Resources

[Disability.gov – Transportation Options in your State](#)
[National Aging and Disability Transportation Center](#)
[Easter Seals Project Action \(ESPA\)](#)

GLOSSARY

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is the US law that ensures rights of persons with disabilities with regard to employment and other issues.

American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) is the standard classification of mental disorders used by mental health professionals in the United States. The current edition, the DSM-5 that was released in May 2013, merged all autism disorders into one umbrella diagnosis of ASD.

Anxiety disorder is a disorder that affects an estimated 30% of individuals with autism and includes social phobia, separation anxiety, panic disorder and specific phobias. An individual suffering from anxiety may experience strong internal sensations of tension such as a racing heart, muscular tensions and stomachache.

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) is a style of teaching using series of trials to shape desired behavior or response. Skills are broken into small components and taught to child through a system of reinforcement.

Asperger syndrome is a developmental disorder on the autism spectrum defined by impairments in communication and social development and by repetitive interests and behaviors, without a significant delay in language and cognitive development. The diagnosis is no longer used in DSM-5, but instead indicates that individuals with a "well-established diagnosis" of these conditions "should be given the diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder."

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a disorder that affects approximately 1 in 5 children with autism (statistics are not currently available for the prevalence in adults with autism). Symptoms include chronic problems with inattention, impulsivity and hyperactivity.

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) refers to the systems and devices used by people who, some or all of the time, cannot rely on their speech. Typically, AAC includes unaided modes of communication, like sign language, and aided modes of communication, like communication boards or iPads.

Autism community is an umbrella term that includes autistic individuals, parents and family members of autistic people, providers, autism allies. Some autistic individuals prefer to be excluded from this term.

Autistic community refers to the community of autistic individuals.

Bipolar disorder is a psychiatric condition once commonly called manic-depression that involves episodes of abnormally high-energy alternating with depression over a period of time.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is a form of treatment that focuses on examining the relationships between thoughts, feelings and behaviors and is used primarily to help individuals with autism regulate their emotions, develop impulse control and improve their behavior as a result.

Depression is a common but serious illness that involves sadness that interferes with daily life. People with depression may experience a lack of interest and pleasure in daily activities, lack of energy, feelings of worthlessness or excessive guilt and recurrent thoughts of death or suicide.

Executive functioning is a core term that relates to the challenges faced by individuals with autism, including skills such as organizing, planning, sustaining attention and inhibiting inappropriate responses.

Fragile X Syndrome is a genetic disorder that can cause intellectual disability, behavioral and learning challenges. There is no cure, but therapies, interventions, and medications are often prescribed to treat behavioral symptoms like anxiety, aggression, and ADHD.

Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) provide opportunities for Medicaid beneficiaries to receive services in their own home or community. These programs serve a variety of targeted populations groups, such as people with mental illnesses, intellectual or developmental disabilities, and/or physical disabilities.

Job Accommodation Network (JAN) is the leading source of free, expert and confidential guidance on workplace accommodations and disability employment issues. JAN helps people with disabilities enhance their employability and shows employers how to capitalize on the value and talent that people with disabilities add to the workplace.

Medicaid waiver is a program that states may choose to use to provide home and community-based services (HCBS), like respite and rehabilitation, to individuals with disabilities who need a certain level of care; all states operate Medicaid waivers to provide HCBS but the eligibility rules and services vary across waiver programs and most states have long waiting lists for these programs.

Nonverbal communication is the process of communicating by sending and receiving wordless (mostly visual) cues between people, including postures, facial expressions, gestures and eye gaze.

Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) is a psychiatric disorder characterized by unreasonable thoughts and fears (obsessions) that lead individuals to do repetitive behaviors (compulsions).

Panic disorder is a psychiatric condition diagnosed in people who experience spontaneous seemingly out-of-the-blue panic attacks and are preoccupied with the fear of a recurring attack.

Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is an act of Congress that prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in programs conducted by federal agencies, in programs receiving federal financial assistance, in federal employment, and in the employment practices of federal contractors. Section 504 of the Act created and extended civil rights protections to people with disabilities.

Schizophrenia is a serious mental disorder in which people interpret reality abnormally. Symptoms can include delusions, hallucinations, disorganized speech, trouble with thinking and lack of motivation.

Self-advocate is a person who takes an active role in improving their own life by speaking up for themselves and communicate their own needs, wants and interests. Here it refers to autistic individuals.

Self-advocacy is representing oneself. Here it refers to autistic individuals.

Self-regulation refers to both conscious and unconscious processes that have an impact on self-control, but regulatory activities take place more or less constantly to allow us to participate in society, work and family life. Self-control is a conscious activity.

Sensory Integration Dysfunction (SID) is a neurological disorder causing difficulties processing information from the five classic senses (vision, hearing, touch, smell and taste), sense of movement (vestibular system) and positional sense (proprioception). Sensory information is sensed normally, but perceived abnormally. SID may be a disorder on its own or with other neurological conditions.

Social Communication Disorder (SCD) is a new diagnostic category established in the DSM-5 that applies to individuals who have deficits in the social use of language, but do not have the restricted interests or repetitive behavior you see in those with autism spectrum disorders.

Social phobia is a strong fear of being judged by others and of being embarrassed, that can be so strong that it gets in the way of going to work or school or doing other every day things.

Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) is a Social Security Administration program that provides benefits to people with disabilities (including those with visual impairments) who are “insured” by workers’ contributions to the Social Security trust fund, based on one’s wage earnings (or those of one’s spouse or parents) as required by the Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA).

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is a program of the Social Security Administration that pays benefits to people with disabilities who have limited income and resources. It is designed to help aged, blind, and disabled people who have little or no income. And it provides cash to meet basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter.

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is the leading national public health institute of the United States. Its main goal is to protect public health and safety and is responsible for calculating the autism prevalence numbers, which as of 2023, stand at 1 in 36 children.

U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) is a division of the U.S. Department of Labor dedicated to developing and influencing policies and practices that increase the number and quality of employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

Vocational rehabilitation (VR; sometimes shortened to “voc rehab” in conversation) is a federal and state-funded program providing services to help individuals with disabilities enter or return to employment. It is designed to assist individuals of work age with physical and/or mental disabilities compete successfully with others in earning a living.



Employment Tool Kit Worksheet

Service providers

Make a list of service providers in your area. Include their contact information. Reach out to them if you are interested in a supported employment provider.

AGENCY / CONTACT	PHONE NUMBER	EMAIL	DATE CONTACTED	SERVICE REQUESTED	APPOINTMENT DATE	DOCUMENTS NEEDED	FOLLOW-UP

Career assessments

Document the type of career assessments that you have participated in and a summary of the results.

School related:

ASSESSMENT

SUMMARY

Job related:

ASSESSMENT

SUMMARY

Jobs to consider

Identify jobs that match your skills and interests. Include your dream jobs..

Jobs that match my skills and interests: (Ex: Customer service)

Dream jobs: (Ex: Disney World tour guide)

Business ideas:

Write down business ideas that you thought about starting or would like to start. (Ex: Lawn care service)

Your network:

Make a list of all the people you know who could be helpful in your job search.

NAME	TITLE / POSITION	RELATIONSHIP	CONTACT INFORMATION	HOW THEY CAN HELP

Resume

Use our template to start building your resume.

[NAME]

[Street address], [City, State] [Zip code]

[Phone number] / [Email]

SUMMARY *(highlight your skills. Describe your career goals or ideal job)*

EXPERIENCE

[Company/organization name], [City, State]

[Dates of employment]

[Job title]

- [job achievement]
- [job achievement]
- [job achievement]

EDUCATION

[School name], [City, State]

[Dates attended]

[Job title]

[Degree(s) obtained]

[Special awards or accomplishments]

SKILLS *(Ex: Trade skills / Computer skills)*

REFERENCES

Available upon request

References

Use our template to create a list of at least three references to share with your potential employers once you secure an interview. You should contact each to ask for their permission to be used as your reference. You should also inform them when a potential employer may be reaching out.

[NAME]

[Street address], [City, State] [Zip code]

[Phone number] / [Email]

REFERENCES

[Name]

[Job position], [Company]

[Phone number] / [Email]

[Relationship]

[Years known]

Questions to ask during your interview

Come up with questions to find out more about the job, the company, your interviewer and if the employer is a fit for you.

Below are some suggestions:

1. *How have people previously succeeded in this role?*
2. *How do you like to give and receive feedback?*
3. *What is your biggest challenge in your role?*
4. *Are there times of the day or year that are extra busy?*

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

Accommodations

Make a list of accommodations that you have relied on in the past in other settings, like school, and some you think may help you in the workplace.

ACCOMMODATION	SETTING USED	BARRIER	HELPS
<i>Ex: Headphones</i>	<i>Ex: Noisy spaces</i>	<i>Ex: Sensitivity to loud noises</i>	<i>Ex: Improves focus and productivity</i>

Disclosure considerations

Write down the reasons you may want to disclose your disability and why you may not want to. Share this list with a member of your support network and/or job coach to help you make your decision.

Reasons to disclose:

- *Ex: I need an accommodation for a modified break schedule*

Reasons not to disclose:

- *Ex: My diagnosis does not affect my job performance*



Have more questions or need assistance?
Please contact the Autism Response Team for information, resources and tools.

TOLL FREE: 888-AUTISM2 (288-4762) | help@autismspeaks.org

EN ESPANOL: 888-772-9050 | ayuda@autismspeaks.org

autismspeaks.org