

Supporting Autistic Adults in Accessing Employment Opportunities

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What is autism?

Autism is caused by differences in brain development. It is reflected in how a person processes information, perceives and experiences the world around them, and communicates and interacts with others. The characteristics of autism are expressed uniquely in each autistic individual.

Autism is part of the natural diversity of the human brain and nervous system. Each of us has a uniquely developed brain and nervous system, as well as a distinctive combination of strengths and needs.

Autism is an innate characteristic of a person. It is not caused by dysfunctional parenting, poor upbringing, or any similar factor. Rather, it has both genetic and physiological foundations.

Autism is a lifelong characteristic. It does not disappear with age but remains present throughout a person's life. Autism is not an illness, and it neither needs to nor can be cured or eliminated.

Autism and Employment

Autistic people have many strengths that can be valuable in the workplace. Many have **strong concentration skills** and the **ability to focus** on what is relevant, identify errors, and solve even complex problems.

When a job is a good match for the individual, support may not be needed at all.

When **accommodations** are required, it is important to consider the employee's individual characteristics so that their workload remains manageable. In many cases, the accommodations autistic employees need relate to **the clarity** of work tasks and the work environment, as well as **communication** within the workplace community.

Understanding Strengths

- Attention to detail
 - Strong special interests
 - Reliability and persistence
 - Different perspectives and problem-solving
 - Analytical thinking
 - Strong pattern recognition
- Ability to spot errors, inconsistencies, and anomalies that others may overlook.
 - Commitment to developing expertise in particular subjects.
 - Completing tasks and following established processes.
 - Approaching challenges from a different perspective.
 - Systematic approach to understanding complex problems.
 - Identifying trends, relationships, and solutions that others might miss.

Understanding Challenges

- Recruitment processes
 - Unstructured interviews that assess social skills rather than job-related competence.
 - Interpreting vague questions, hidden expectations, or hypothetical scenarios.
 - Unwritten workplace rules and office politics.
 - Small talk, coffee breaks, communication style, masking...
 - Open plan offices, lighting, noise, clutter...
 - Increased stress, fatigue, or sensory overload during busy workdays...
 - Prioritizing, planning, organizing multiple tasks
 - Switching tasks, managing deadlines, need for instructions...
- Social expectations at work
- Sensory environments
- Executive functioning demands

Support for Autistic People Entering Working Life: “The Ideal”

Person-centred career planning

- Identifying the young person's strengths, interests, support needs, and career goals.
- Exploring suitable career paths and work environments that match their skills and preferences.
- Involving the young person in all decisions about their employment journey.

Early work experience opportunities

- Providing internships, work placements, summer jobs, job shadowing, volunteering, and workplace visits.
- Helping develop practical work skills, confidence, and understanding of workplace expectations.
- Offering opportunities to explore different career options before entering full-time employment.

Support for Autistic People Entering Working Life: “The Ideal”

- **Reasonable adjustments from the start**
 - Discussing support needs during recruitment, onboarding, and employment.
 - Providing adjustments such as clear written instructions, a workplace mentor, flexible working arrangements, quiet workspaces, or gradual introduction to new tasks.
 - Ensuring support is available during the transition into employment.
- **Clear communication and workplace expectations**
 - Explaining workplace rules, routines, and expectations explicitly rather than assuming prior knowledge.
 - Providing clear instructions, deadlines, and feedback.
 - Helping the young employee understand workplace culture, professional communication, and social expectations.
 - Communicating changes in tasks, schedules, or procedures in advance whenever possible

Role of Supporters

- Encouraging self-awareness and self-advocacy. Help the young person recognize their strengths, interests, support needs, and career goals.
- Encourage them to express their preferences and advocate for the support they need.
- Support career exploration. Discuss different career options and identifying roles that match the individual's strengths and interests.
- Assist with researching educational pathways, training opportunities, and potential employers.
- Help develop work-related skills. Support the development of practical skills such as time management, organization, communication, and problem-solving.
- Encourage independence in daily routines and responsibilities.
- Assist with job search activities. Provide support with preparing CVs, job applications, and interview practice.
- Help identify work experience, volunteering, internship, or employment opportunities.
- Support workplace transitions. Help the young person prepare for new environments, routines, and expectations.
- Assist with planning transportation, work schedules, and daily routines.
- Promote confidence and resilience. Encourage a positive attitude toward learning and employment.
- Provide emotional support when facing challenges, setbacks, or changes.
- Facilitate access to support services. Connect the young person with career counselors, employment specialists, job coaches, disability services, or autism support organizations.
- Help coordinate support between education providers, employment services, and employers.
- Support seeking workplace accommodations. Help the young person identify and communicate any reasonable adjustments they may need.
- Encourage open discussion about support strategies that promote success and well-being at work.
- Balance support and independence!
- Provide guidance when needed while encouraging increasing independence and decision-making.
- Support the young person to take ownership of their employment goals and career development.

What Can Employers Do to Support Autistic Employees?

- Use inclusive and accessible recruitment processes.
- Focus on skills and abilities rather than social performance in interviews.
- Offer work trials, internships, or practical assessments.
- Clearly explain recruitment stages and expectations.
- Provide comprehensive and structured onboarding.
- Use clear, direct, and unambiguous communication.
- Provide written instructions and meeting summaries.
- Clearly define roles, responsibilities, and deadlines.
- Give regular, constructive feedback.
- Communicate changes in advance whenever possible.
- Make reasonable workplace adjustments.
- Provide quiet workspaces or sensory-friendly environments.
- Allow flexible working arrangements where possible.
- Offer assistive technology and organizational tools.
- Support effective workload and task management.
- Provide mentoring, coaching, or buddy programs.
- Train managers and staff on autism and neurodiversity.
- Foster an inclusive and respectful workplace culture.
- Encourage acceptance of different communication styles.
- Prevent bullying, discrimination, and exclusion.
- Recognize and utilize individual strengths and talents.
- Support career development and progression opportunities.
- Regularly review support needs and workplace accommodations.
- Create psychologically safe environments where employees feel comfortable discussing support needs.

What an autistic person can do to help entering the labour market:

1. Identify Strengths and Interests -> Skills, hobbies, interrests
2. Set (Employment) Goals -> Motivation needs goals!
3. Recognise Support Needs -> Self-understanding
4. Advocate for Accommodations -> Reasonable accomodations
5. Develop Employability Skills
6. Gain Experience -> Training, volunteering
7. **Mentors**
8. Continue Learning -> Courses, new skills
9. Prepare for Workplace -> Problem-solving and self-advocacy skills
10. Acknowledge Progress

Focus on identifying strengths and interests, setting realistic employment goals, recognizing support needs, and advocating for accommodations. These steps can help autistic individuals finding meaningful employment and succeed in the workplace.

Introducing Spectrum Map (Kirjokartta)

Many people receive an autism spectrum diagnosis only in their teens or even later. When you don't know much about your own traits, it can be harder to understand what kind of support you need—and just as hard to recognize and express your strengths.

Spectrum Map is designed especially for autistic youth and young adults aged 14–28.

On the site, you'll find topics like:

Interaction and communication

Planning and organization

Habits and interests

Senses, body, and stress

Let's explore Spectrum Map

Spectrum Map is designed for independent use, but you can also use it together with people close to you, like parents or support workers. The website pays special attention to accessibility, and an English version is available,

You can find Spectrum map at:
<https://autismiliitto.fi/en/spectrum-map/>

The Spectrum Map website covers the following topics:

- **Interaction and communication**
- **Planning and organizing**
- **Habits and interests**
- **Senses, body, and stress**

How to Use – Instructional Video:

https://youtu.be/Q_cFkJEG2CM (at the moment only in Finnish)

- This short video shows you how to use this tool step by step. You'll learn how to explore your own traits, reflect on your experiences, and use the tool in a way that works best for you.



Examples of Use

- Online self-reflection tool
- Supports planning and goal setting
- Helps identify strengths and support needs

Useful in employment support discussions:

- Career planning conversations
- Preparing for employment services
- Supporting transition planning
- Monitoring progress over time

Paldies!

Questions and discussion

