

Top 5 autism tips for professionals: Recruitment and interviews (for employers)

Top Tip 1: What are the main barriers to finding work for autistic people?

I think the main barriers to finding work are in the job seeking process itself, the application process, and also in the interview situation. So with job seeking it can be really difficult to link potentially transferable skills and experience to potential roles. In the application process, open and vague questions on application forms can be difficult. Also telephone screening is another real common difficulty. In the interview situation, group tasks, group situations and face-to-face interviews could be difficult. Often employers rely on things like body language, facial expressions and eye contact to gauge a person's enthusiasm or confidence, and this can be a real difficulty.

Top Tip 2: How to adjust your application process

Employers can make reasonable adjustments to their application process and this is outlined on .gov's websites. Some of those adjustments that we would recommend are providing tick boxes for answers on application forms, eliminating vague or open questions, telephone screening... It's really useful as well to provide really clear explicit information about what the job really entails and really think about the language that you're using as well. So instead of saying something like "would need to have good interpersonal skills", rephrase that to say, "candidate must be able to demonstrate an ability to communicate and work well with others to meet deadlines".

Top Tip 3: Information to provide before the interview

It's really useful to provide a really detailed structure before an interview including timings and different parts of the interview. If some of them are a technical test (questions) that can be outlined... and also the topics that are going to be asked about. Sometimes it's useful to provide staff profiles as well. It's very useful to provide details of the interview location including links to Google Maps and travel information... It's also useful to provide questions between five and seven days in advance for autistic applicants and candidates. This doesn't mean that the applicant will have an unfair advantage because one of the main difficulties that autistic people have is thinking on their feet and being able to process information very very quickly. So providing questions in advance means that they'll be able to really construct meaningful replies to these questions.

Top Tip 4: Adjustments to be made to the interview

There are several standard adjustments that we would recommend considering for candidates at interview. The first one is to be mindful of how you're phrasing questions and avoid hypothetical or abstract questioning such as "where do you see yourself in five years?"; it'd be much more useful to rephrase that question, for example, to say "what have you particularly enjoyed working on in any of your past projects or experiences?" Another standard adjustment that we would recommend is to ensure that the interview room is quiet and private with no opportunities for distractions, no outside noise, and a comfortable temperature as well. We'd also recommend that your candidate is provided with a quiet private area that's separate and away from any busy areas of the building - perhaps there's heavy pedestrian traffic in that area - just so that they're able to manage their anxiety before the interview. We'd also suggest that you could offer to your candidate that they could have a support worker or be accompanied by an advocate during the interview if they feel this would be helpful.

Top Tip 5: Information to provide when offering a role to an autistic candidate

I think in the first instance when offering a role to a successful autistic candidate, you should ask that employee if they need any reasonable adjustments. The other thing you can do is that you can arrange for a workplace assessment to be carried out. This will identify any issues and any strengths that your employee has, and also provide recommendations to make adjustments.

We'd also recommend that you adapt any initial induction or training that you need to provide. Make sure that you are providing supporting visual information such as timetables, staff profiles and video clips if necessary – and also provide your new employee with an opportunity after their induction or initial training to discuss any difficulties or questions or concerns they have with you in a one-to-one situation.