



Autism and working life: exploring experiences



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What is autism?

Autism is a **spectrum condition**, meaning it affects people in different ways. It is a lifelong developmental condition that affects how people experience the world and interact with others. The two key difficulties required for a diagnosis are:

- Social communication and social interaction challenges
- Repetitive and restrictive behaviour



Social communication and interaction

Autistic people have difficulties with interpreting both **verbal and non-verbal language** (gestures, tone of voice, facial expressions etc) and **'reading' other people**.

What does this mean to you?

1. Take a seat
2. I'm fine...



Social communication and interaction

Navigating the social world can be difficult and stressful for people with autism.

Autistic people may:

- Appear to be insensitive (unintentionally - perhaps because they missed a social cue)
- Seek time alone
- Not seek comfort from others
- Appear to behave in a way that is socially inappropriate
- Find it hard to form relationships
- Take things literally
- Need extra time to process information
- Repeating what others say to them

What unwritten rules do you have in your workplace?

Example: in my office, people leave their own mugs in the communal kitchen, but you must not use someone else's mug!

Repetitive and restrictive behaviour

People with autism often **prefer to have routines**, so they know what to expect.

They may also **repeat movements**, often to help calm themselves when they are stressed or actions, and because they find it enjoyable and relaxing.

Change to this routine can be overwhelming: Christmas, roadworks, uncertainty at work can trigger anxiety.



Other symptoms of autism

It's important to remember that **everyone is different, so not every autistic person has the same challenges.**

Some other symptoms of autism include:

- Sensory sensitivity (over or under-sensitive)
- Highly focused interests or hobbies
- Extreme anxiety
- Meltdowns and shutdowns

As the we understand more about autism, the definition and diagnosis requirements have changed, and could change in the future.

Strengths and abilities

Sadly, many people focus on the 'deficits' of neurodivergent conditions and overlook the number of strengths that people have. Some of those include:

- Ability to hyperfocus (high levels of concentration)
- Attention to detail and high accuracy
- Good memory and detailed knowledge
- Punctual and reliable
- Creativity
- Honesty, loyalty and empathy
- And more (feel free to share in the chat box!)



Autism in the workplace

These strengths are extremely relevant in the workplace and there's a growing number of workplaces actively recruiting autistic employees including Google, Microsoft and PwC.



Autism in the workplace

Some helpful adjustments and support you can provide:

- First, and foremost, ask what support they need and never make assumptions – work together to provide the most effective support and reasonable adjustments
- Provide clear expectations of the job and any ‘unwritten rules’ of the workplace or etiquette
- Concise and specific instructions
- Structure and routines at work
- Work together to adjust the environment
- Raise awareness of neurodiversity and support at work



Co-occurring conditions

Other conditions that affect autistic people may be:

- Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD, or AuDHD to include autism)
- Dyslexia and dyspraxia
- Problems sleeping (insomnia)
- Mental health conditions (anxiety, depression, OCD, eating disorders)
- Learning disabilities
- Epilepsy

1 in 100

people have autism, with some studies suggesting this figure could be higher. That means more than 700,000 people in the UK are autistic.

“When you meet one person with autism, you’ve met one person with autism”.

— **Dr Steven Shore**, highlighting how autism is very diverse

Professor with
autism and
expert on the
condition

Being a supportive colleague/manager

- Learn about autism from good sources
- Understand them as an individual and what they need; don't expect them to always adjust to a typical way – differences and diversity is often better!
- Support social interaction in different ways
- Create an environment that is conducive to work (this often helps everybody too!)
- Be non-judgmental and respectful of differences and individuality



Screening autism

Getting a diagnosis of any neurodivergent condition can be a significant step, but it **often helps you better understand yourself, your needs and behaviours.**

Screening assessments can help you understand if you meet the criteria for autism and are quicker and more accessible before pursuing a full diagnostic assessment. It also legally entitles you to **reasonable adjustments and funding** to help you with any accommodations at work.

Screening autism

Should you want to explore this, come and have a no-obligation chat with us. We're here to help you make an informed decision and help you thrive at work or support a colleague.

Get in touch via enablement@posturite.co.uk



Any questions?

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