

# SUCCESS IN THE WORKPLACE

## EMPLOYER TOOLKIT

Strategies from  
Autistic Employees

## LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT



**Organizations receive many benefits when they provide ongoing learning and development opportunities for their employees.** For-profit companies remain competitive by ensuring their employees have the latest skills and knowledge relating to their jobs. Non-profit organizations are able to keep their services relevant to the changing needs of their clients, ensuring they remain attractive to donors and funders. In addition to remaining relevant and competitive, an organization's employees feel valued because their employer is investing in their learning and professional development.

This encourages greater employee engagement and can support building a more inclusive workplace.

There are two components to learning and development as they relate to autism. The first component supports **ongoing employee learning and development about autism and inclusion**, and the second component is **supporting the learning and professional development needs of autistic employees**.

### Learning about autism and neurodiversity

**#1** recommendation to make a work environment welcoming, inclusive and supportive

Employers and employees who are familiar with autism, or willing to learn. It's essential for an employer to provide their employees with ongoing opportunities to learn about autism and related neurodiversities.

**co-workers who are familiar with autism**

*"The more education about autism my co-workers have the more safe the work environment will be."*

*autistic employee*

**Weave learning about inclusion in all employee-learning programs.** Examples of diversity and inclusion training can include:

- Learning about why diversity matters.
- The workplace and business benefits of an inclusive workplace culture.
- Understanding unconscious bias and its effects on workplace interactions.
- Providing employees with an overall understanding of what autism is, and the easy to implement sensory and communication adjustments that may help an autistic employee or even an autistic customer or client feel supported.

**Consider providing these learning opportunities as part of regular employee training rather than waiting until the company has hired an autistic employee.**

Waiting to offer autism training until you have hired an autistic employee singles the employee out, possibly making them feel uncomfortable. Chances are, even if a company has never employed an autistic individual, they have likely served or interacted with autistic clients or customers. Providing this training on a regular basis benefits all stakeholders involved with the business. Providing diversity and inclusion training including autism-specific training can boost an employer's reputation in the community as well.



***Section 12.1 - Accessing Diversity and Inclusion Training Tool*** offers ten ideas for ways to access training and information about autism, diversity and inclusion.

**Supporting an autistic employee's learning and development**

**It's important to provide autistic employees with equal opportunities for professional development.** This way, they can be just as skilled and productive as their non-autistic co-workers and feel just as valued. If performance reviews identify areas for professional growth, support finding professional development opportunities that would help the employee achieve this growth. Remember that autistic employees may require support in order to benefit equally from professional growth opportunities. When working with the employee to identify learning and development opportunities, consider how inclusive these opportunities are.

For example, **if an employee has to attend training delivered by a third party, is the trainer or training agency open to the employee wearing sunglasses and headphones in the session.** If the answer is no, then consider exploring other opportunities and vendors that provide a more inclusive learning environment.

Empower the employee to be open and honest about their needs, and work with them to determine what supports and adjustments will help them maximize the benefits they receive from these important opportunities. In most cases, these adjustments will be straightforward

and free or inexpensive to implement, just like the adjustments that support them in their regular work duties. Often, they can use the same tools during any professional development that they use for their regular job.

For example, **if the employee is attending a workshop in a classroom with bright, fluorescent lighting that flickers and hums, they can use the same sunglasses and headphones they normally wear at work.** This adjustment is simple to implement and won't result in added costs to the employer.

Be prepared to "think outside the box" when it comes to supporting an employee's personal and professional growth.

As an example, **if an employee has difficulties managing their work schedule, set aside time to find a scheduling app that meets both the employee and employer's needs.** Allow the employee to use professional development time to set-up and learn the new app. This will address the schedule management issue and ultimately improve the employee's performance.

Another example could be **finding a relaxation app for an employee that lives with high anxiety.** Providing the employee with the time and support they need to achieve personal and professional growth will not only make the employee stronger in their role but will make the employer stronger too.

Learning and development is a two-fold concept. **Weaving inclusion and autism learning into an employer's regular employee training programs equips the entire team to support autistic employees, as well as autistic customers and clients.** Providing regular training prevents specific individuals from being singled out and made to feel uncomfortable. At the same time, it's important to provide autistic employees with the same access to professional development opportunities as their non-autistic co-workers. This supports the personal and professional growth of all employees and creates a stronger, more inclusive and more cohesive team. The stronger the team is, the stronger the business or organization, and the better their reputation.