

# SUCCESS IN THE WORKPLACE

## EMPLOYER TOOLKIT

Strategies from  
Autistic Employees

## RETAINING AUTISTIC EMPLOYEES



### 13c supportive access to social situations

Autistic employees are not anti-social, but nonetheless, many find navigating the social maze of the workplace to be a daunting task.

Unplanned and informal social situations, including events like employee picnics and Christmas parties, can be a very stressful experience for many autistic employees.

#### Four key strategies employers can use to support their employees:

- Freedom to skip social events
- Providing advanced notice of social events
- Involve the employee in planning a social event
- Providing access to a mentor to support them during a social event



For more information and tips for communications, strategies refer to [Section 13.4 for Supporting an Employee During Social Events Tool](#).

### Freedom to skip social events

Provide autistic employees with the option to not participate in social events. If they want to attend them, provide guidance on what's expected of them during social events.

The option to not participate in social situations is the number one social support requested by participants in the autistic workers survey.

# What social supports make a difference?

*"Being able to choose whether I want to participate or not; being able to come to a social, if I missed a session, without reprimand."*

*"Freedom to socialize in the ways that work for me, and freedom to socialize or not."*

**autistic employees**

While many employees, including some autistic employees, enjoy social events, they should never be made mandatory, and employees should not be disciplined by management or ostracized by their co-workers for choosing not to attend informal social events that are too stressful for them. This could lead to negative outcomes, including a decrease in communication and an increase of anxiety of people in the workgroup.

## Provide advanced notice of social events

**Provide advanced notice of all planned social events, and keep unplanned social events to a minimum, or preferably avoid them altogether.**

This was the second-highest requested social support identified in the autistic workers survey. Ensure autistic employees have time to mentally and physically prepare for any social events they may wish to attend. Again, provide information on what will happen at the event, when it starts and ends, and reassure the employee they can leave when they wish.

## Planning their own social event

**Allow and even encourage autistic employees to plan their own social events if they wish.**

If the organization has a social committee that's responsible for planning events, then invite the employee to join the committee. This way, they can plan an event that's within their comfort zone, allowing them to participate without undue stress and anxiety. This also provides the opportunity for them to learn more about their co-workers and possibly discover shared interests.

Support and encourage autistic employees to fully participate in the planning of office social events. Provide an opportunity for autistic employees to take the lead in suggesting themes or social activities that fall into their scope of comfort and familiarity and potentially expand the workplace experience in activities. Ensure autistic employees have a full seat at the planning table, supporting them to participate in the planning and activities with lower stress and anxiety. This provides a mutually supportive environment to learn about co-workers and discover shared interests.

*“One thing that I feel would [help] an autistic employee [feel] more welcome is the ability to personally plan a social event. Doing so would allow them to meet with other employees without stepping out of their comfort zone. It also gives them a chance to share their interests with other employees.”*

## Event planning

*autistic employee*

### Provide a mentor

Simply put, a mentor can assist an autistic employee in preparing for social events and be available as a support person during events

Many organizations and businesses offer periodic informal social events for their employees. While many employees enjoy the laughs and conversations, many times these events are a nightmare for autistic employees due to challenges with social engagement. For these reasons, it's important to keep these events optional for everybody, with no pressure to attend. If an autistic employee wants to attend, these strategies, along with other strategies the employee may identify, are important tools in ensuring everybody has a good time at these events.



for more information about how a mentor can support an autistic employee in navigating the complex social aspects of the workplace, refer to section **Section 11.1 - The Role of A Mentor and How to Choose One Tool.**

### Conclusion

Hiring an employee is a significant cost to employers. For that reason, employers are keen to retain their employees for many years and keep the costs of employee turnover to a minimum. These strategies, identified by autistic employees themselves, offer some good first steps to supporting autistic employees, encouraging them to remain with their employer for the long term. Keep in mind that, as with all the strategies, the above list is comprehensive but not exhaustive. Individual employees may have additional or simply different needs than those identified above. Always keep an open mind and be willing to collaborate with the employee on identifying their support needs.