



National Disability Coordination Officer Program
AN AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT INITIATIVE

Working effectively with people with an autism spectrum disorder

What are autism spectrum disorders?

- Autism spectrum disorders are lifelong developmental disabilities
- They are characterised by difficulties in:
 - Social interaction
 - understanding and use of non-verbal communication
 - forming friendships
 - social and emotional responsiveness
 - Communication
 - language development
 - initiating and sustaining conversations
 - Restricted and repetitive interests, activities and behaviours
 - unusually specific interests
 - repetitive body movements
 - non-functional routines
- People with an autism spectrum disorder may also have sensory sensitivities, intellectual or learning disabilities
- Types of autism spectrum disorders include:
 - Autistic disorder
 - impairments in social interaction and communication as well as restricted and repetitive interests, activities and behaviours
 - generally evident prior to three years of age
 - Asperger's syndrome
 - difficulties with social interaction and social communication as well as restricted and repetitive interests, activities and behaviours
 - **NO** significant delay in early language acquisition
 - **NO** significant delay in cognitive abilities
 - Atypical autism
 - marked social impairment but fails to meet full criteria for either autistic disorder or Asperger's syndrome
 - may have communication impairments and/or restricted and repetitive interests, activities and behaviours

Affects of autism spectrum disorders in the workplace

- An employee with an autism spectrum disorder may have difficulties with:
 - Interacting with colleagues, managers and clients
 - Engaging in conversation
 - Understanding abstract concepts, metaphors or sarcasm
 - Interpreting and using non-verbal communication
 - Working with distractions
 - Decision making and problem solving
 - Maintaining concentration and motivation on some tasks
 - Working in unfamiliar environments
 - Time management and organisation
 - Change

Reasonable adjustments for autism spectrum disorders

- Reasonable adjustments need to be individualised to meet employees' specific needs.
- It is important to **ask** the employee what would be most helpful for them.
- Some examples of reasonable adjustments that may help employees with an autism spectrum disorder include:
 - 'To do' lists and checklists
 - Developing a consistent work routine
 - Providing information in multiple formats, including pictures, diagrams, models or work samples
 - Additional on-the-job training and ongoing support
 - Job restructuring or exchanging jobs among employees
 - Formal or informal mentoring or buddy program
 - Assistance with prioritising tasks
 - Speech recognition software – eg. Dragon NaturallySpeaking
 - Reducing distractions in the workplace
 - Use of noise-cancelling headphones
 - Provision of concrete 'rules' around work culture (appropriate dress, grooming, behaviour etc)

Sources

Autism Spectrum Australia

www.autismspectrum.org.au

JobAccess

http://jobaccess.gov.au/ServiceProviders/Assisting_job_seekers/Supporting_jobseekers_with_different_types_of_disability/Pages/home.aspx

Towards success in tertiary education with asperger's syndrome

<http://www.services.unimelb.edu.au/edp/downloads/aspergers.pdf>

Scan to access
resource online

