



**AUTISM AWARENESS:
Hiring and Supporting
a Neurodiverse Workforce**

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Autism Awareness Month takes place in April to spread knowledge about autism spectrum disorders and to celebrate the unique experiences and abilities of people with autism. Autism is defined as a developmental disorder that is characterized by difficulty in social interaction and communication as well as restrictive or repetitive patterns in thought and behavior, but can manifest differently among individuals.

Facts About Autism

Increased awareness about this neurological difference has helped dispel myths about autism and break down the stigma surrounding it. An estimated [2.21%](#) of adults in the U.S. live with Autism Spectrum Disorders. There have been [many studies](#) regarding the IQ and cognitive ability of autistic people. Although there has been no definitive proof that autism is always associated with either cognitive impairment or even high intelligence, [more than half of autistic individuals](#) are estimated to have average or above average IQs.

The [2015 National Autism Indicators Report: Transition into Young Adulthood](#) found that 36% of autistic people pursue post-secondary education. Thirty percent of young adults with autism studying at a 2-year college and 50% that attended a 4-year college majored in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields — areas of expertise that are in high demand in the working world. Yet, as of 2019, an alarming [85%](#) of college graduates with autism were unemployed.

The misconception that people with autism are not capable of working not only underestimates them, but also causes companies to miss out on the unique perspectives and abilities they lend to the workplace. [Autism is often connected](#) to traits like attention to detail and increased creativity. Neurodiversity — the wide array of thinking styles and abilities — is also an important dimension of your workplace's overall D&I efforts.

While autism comes with definite challenges, organizations can also make easy accommodations to help employees do their best work that come at low or no cost to companies.

Common Workplace Challenges Associated With Autism

Autism affects everyone differently – and we are learning more about how men and women [exhibit different symptoms](#). However, here are some obstacles autistic employees may face in the workplace.

Interview difficulties: Many people with autism have challenges with communication, assessing others' emotions or understanding others' social cues. Company cultures that emphasize social skills without leaving room for the diverse ways in which neurodivergent people navigate social situations can alienate people with autism.

Sensory sensitivity: Autism can cause people to experience stimuli differently than others. They can be either hyper- or hypo-sensitive to things like light, touch, smells and sounds.

Difficulties with change: Some autistic people may struggle with roles that require them to change routines quickly.

Difficulties with executive function: In some cases, autism causes people to struggle with regulating emotions or motivating themselves to complete certain tasks.

Accommodations That Support Autistic Employees

While some people with autism have aides who help them accomplish daily tasks, organizations also have the responsibility to be inclusive to all. Some simple workplace accommodations can help autistic employees feel comfortable and perform at their best.

Inclusive recruitment: Some companies establish their own [programs](#) or hire third parties specializing in the recruitment, hiring, onboarding and retention of neurodiverse individuals.

Mentoring, coaching and support: Offer training and job coaching for autistic employees that focus not only on the hard skills required for their position, but also emphasize social communication and take place in the employee's work setting to help them adjust.

Leadership training: Managers and colleagues should be educated on autism and be trained on how to best communicate and collaborate with autistic employees.

Offering structure: Many autistic people work best in environments where there are definitive rules or routines. Be thorough in explaining guidelines and setting up routines for them – even if your company is more accustomed to a more flexible approach.

