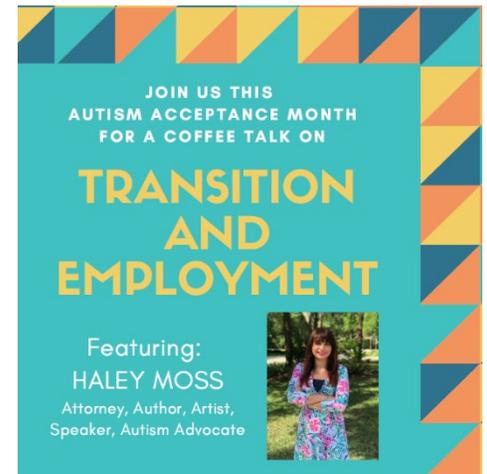


Question 1: This was very helpful. What would you recommend for those that do very well in the academic environment and might have multiple degrees but struggle to find a good fit for a job or maintain steady employment?

Answer 1: *I feel that in my soul as somebody who has two bachelor's degrees and a Law degree, so I am already empathetic to this person's situation. My advice is that it is all about interviewing and finding the right fit and it doesn't always happen immediately. With steady employment, we have to understand why individuals are struggling. So, it might be that it's an office culture issue, office politics, or it might be work-related performance and not receiving appropriate workplace accommodations. So, I think we kind of have to revisit history and see why this is happening. Why is this person who is obviously brilliant, qualified, and deserves the privileges of employment? Why are these struggling in this situation and how can we help them? What kind of strategies need to be in place for them or the employer to keep that constant, collaborative nature? This process is very interactive, and I think what happens a lot is there is usually some form of miscommunication or there's already bias in play before the miscommunication starts. Each person is different, but these are some things I would suggest troubleshooting or investigating a little deeper. What accommodations has this person received? What have been consistent issues this person has had and how can we work together to remedy this or work with the employer to be more inclusive in the first place?*



Question 2: How do you recommend someone talk about their employment gaps during an interview, if they don't want to disclose at that point?

Answer 2: *Such a great question—let me give this one some thought. It really depends on the situation. Is it just a gap with unemployment or it could be looking for the right fit? Every situation is different...I know for me I am self-employed and I think that would be part of how I describe it for me. But everyone's situation with employment gaps might look a little different. Sometimes, it actually is helpful to disclose that there is an employment gap because then it won't be seen as this person is just completely undesirable and it might explain some things like they are really qualified and just haven't been given opportunities to succeed and there are barriers to access. Based on some of the research I have seen, it could be actually be a favorable time to disclose. But if you don't disclose, I think that it could raise a couple of flags. I think it is really important to try to not focus on that so much, especially at the interview stage. Unfortunately, the process for hiring is not always fair, I truly believe it is not fair more often than not. How do we get around that and minimize the gap in that situation and highlight their strengths or be sure that the person is shown in the best light as possible. Haley will follow up with more thoughts and recommendations later.*

Question 3: Are there specific types of jobs or job fields to encourage young autistic adults to explore that might be most successful?

Answer 3: *Depends on the person and their interest and strengths. I know there are a lot of stereotypes and neurodiverse hiring initiatives really target the science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields and I really respect those initiatives greatly and I think they are wonderful starting points. But not all of us are gifted computer geniuses, myself included. Part of why I went to law school was to avoid doing math. Not all autistic individuals are gifted in computers, math, science, etc. Autistic people can be successful in ANY field given with the right amount of support. Some fields are better at actively recruiting neurodiverse candidates, but more importantly is what is interesting to the person, what are their passions, and what they are good at and making sure that is translatable into a job that they actually enjoy. Because if you stuck me in the tech world, even though it is hiring, I would probably not be qualified, would be unhappy, and it probably wouldn't go well for everybody involved, even with the right support.*

Question 4: How can we better help autistic children and adolescents earlier in life? Are there ways we can better be allies to autistic people when they are younger vs. later in life?

Answer 4: *I have a lot of feelings about this and my views on this have changed so much with the older I have gotten. So, I was one of those kids that masked a lot because I wanted to be socially accepted. Looking back, I wish that autistic young people knew that they could actually be themselves and still find people that would be socially accepting of them. We shouldn't just be teaching those as the only survival and social skills that are necessary, as I look back on adolescence. When I advise other parents, support professionals, and others that love our young people and adolescents is that first off, please encourage self-advocacy. I know that we talked about self-advocacy today, but it is super important for young people to learn these things that usually get overlooked. I know that as the adults in the room sometimes want to be the ones who should be advocating with them. We have to know what an autistic person's special interests are in and encourage that no matter what you think in terms of if it makes sense or whether or not you think it makes sense or if you find it interesting. Any notions of age or gender appropriateness that you have, throw them out the window. The things that make us happy make us REALLY happy and there is not nearly enough focus on autistic joy. And I think that for young people whose bodies and social environments are changing, the expectations of them are changing as they transition into adolescence and the adulthood. Focusing on and encouraging that autistic joy is so crucial. We really don't celebrate the things that make us really excited and happy and I know that even when my hands flap, it is a full-body joy that neurotypical people usually don't get to experience. So, I really do think that celebrating the things that make us happy, especially in a world that doesn't always accept us, that's a powerful thing.*