

# Transition & Employment: Neurodiversity at Work

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# A Note on Accessibility

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This session strives to be as inclusive as possible!

No one person can grant or gatekeep access. Access is something we create together.

If you need to take a break, answer phone calls, stand up, twiddle your fingers, stim, or feel overwhelmed - this is a no judgment zone! Go for it!

Copies of these slides to follow along have alt text on images and should also be accessible for screen readers. 😊

# What is Autism?

- Autism is a complex neurological condition and developmental disability characterized by a spectrum of differences in social communication and interaction, heightened sensory processing and experiences, intense passions or interests, and repetitive behaviors
- The CDC estimates 1 in 54 children are autistic.
  - Autistic adults make up about 2.2% of the population (about 5.4 million Americans).

# What is Neurodiversity?

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Neurodiversity is a concept where neurological differences are to be recognized and respected as any other human variation. Differences that fall under neurodiversity include autism, ADHD, dyslexia and other learning disabilities, Tourette Syndrome, and intellectual disabilities.



# Benefits of Neurodiversity at Work

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- Neurodiverse teams at SAP created a fix that saved the company nearly \$40 million
- 28% higher revenues than companies that do not employ people with disabilities (Accenture, 2019)
- Favorable public opinion of a business
- We benefit from working with all kinds of minds



# Employment Disparity

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- Despite the benefits of neurodiversity at work...
  - Traditional hiring practices are biased against autistic candidates
  - Neurotypical people misinterpret autistic communication
  - Body language, eye contact
  - Gaps in employment
  - Disclosure and discrimination
  - Fear of the unknown

# Disclosure on the Job

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- When is the right time to disclose autism or neurodivergence?
- It depends on the person!
  - The cover letter
  - The interview
  - When the person has an offer
  - When the person needs an accommodation
- Under the ADA, the general rule is individuals don't have to disclose until an accommodation is needed.



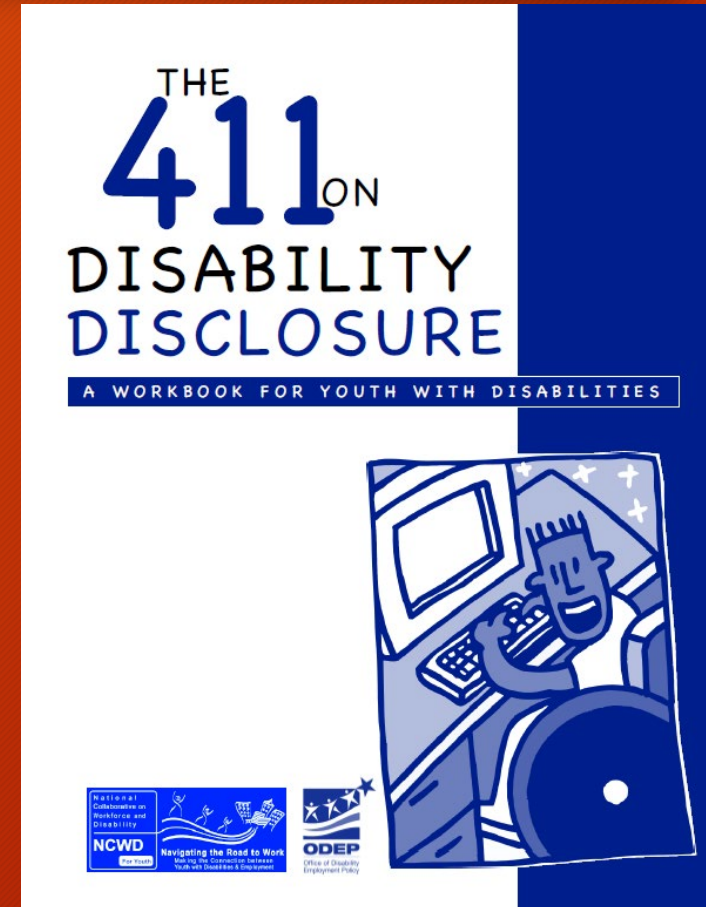
# Disclosure: How Can We Prepare Young People?

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Promote self-advocacy by discussing and providing self-advocacy and disclosure resources!

[http://www.ncwd-youth.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/411\\_Disability\\_Disclosure\\_complete.pdf](http://www.ncwd-youth.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/411_Disability_Disclosure_complete.pdf)

Information about ODEP can be found at  
<http://www.dol.gov/odep/>






# Disclosure Decisions to Get the Job

## Virginia Commonwealth University

### Disclosure Decisions TO GET THE JOB



Every individual with a disability must choose whether to disclose (share) his or her disability with an employer. Primary factors to consider include whether accommodations will be needed on the job or whether a disability is visible or hidden. Other aspects related to the employer and the company may also influence your decision. Follow this disclosure decision guide to determine what will work best for you. Remember, if you choose to disclose your disability, you are protected from discrimination by federal laws.


First, identify a NEED for disclosure, such as determining accessibility, necessary accommodations, or potential job match. Consider your answers to questions in Chart 1 and decide if you have a reason to disclose.


If you decide that disclosure will help you be successful, look at the pros and cons of WHEN you disclose in Chart 2. Then, follow the general guidelines in Chart 3 to decide HOW to disclose.

Effective disclosure can establish a positive working relationship with your employer. Practicing with a close friend, family member, or career counselor can help to increase your comfort level and skills.

#### Three Steps to Disclosing a Disability

1. Determine **NEED** for Disclosure
2. Decide **WHEN** to Disclose
3. Choose **HOW** to Disclose



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### 2. Decide **WHEN** to Disclose: Consider Pros and Cons

When	Potential Gains	Potential Setbacks
In a cover letter	Advance time to prepare positive written disclosure and to tailor your abilities to duties of job description.	Employer's preconceptions may hinder opportunity for an interview. Unable to read employer's body language and mood.
In a resume or on a job application	Establishes "up front" relationship and communication.	Employer may have stereotypes about disabilities and may not offer you an interview.
When employer calls for an interview	Establishes open communication and gives an employer time to review Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 compliance information.	May not get serious consideration during interview.
Before the interview	Shows respect to employer, gives employer advance notice to secure any accommodations that may be needed during the interview, and time to research proper etiquette or refresh knowledge on ADA.	Employer has advance time to yield to his or her stereotypes about disabilities.
During the interview	Opportunity to read employer body language, to time the disclosure, and to disclose in a brief, positive manner.	Employer may feel uneasy and ill prepared to respond with appropriate and legal questions.
After the job offer	May have legal recourse if disclosing disability negatively affects the hiring decision. There is time to get accommodations in place before the job starts. Positive relationship has already been established with employer.	Employer may feel that you have been dishonest in the application process, which may erode trust.
After the job begins	Gives opportunity to establish credibility before disclosure. Gives freedom to talk with co-workers about disability related issues.	May take time to secure requested accommodations. Employer may believe you have not been honest which may negatively affect your relationship.
When performance difficulties arise	Difficulties may not arise (i.e. you may never need to disclose).	Employer may have difficulty changing his or her perceptions of your work performance, feel betrayed or wonder why you waited so long.
Never	Disability information is kept private.	Not protected from discrimination under the ADA.

### 3. Choose **HOW** to Disclose: General Guidelines

How	Examples
Stress current involvement in a positive activity that shows your ability to manage your disability.	<b>Resume</b> -- Member of the American Blind Skiing Foundation
Be optimistic; focus on your abilities and job qualifications.	<b>Cover Letter</b> -- As an individual with a life long physical and speech disability, I learned early on to focus on my intellectual abilities and to develop strengths within my limits. For example, I received my first computer when I was 5 years old and learned to operate it independently. Today I am proficient in many software applications, operating systems, and system troubleshooting.
Give the employer information on what he or she needs to do or provide regarding communication, directions, or supervision.	<b>Telephone Call Prior to the Interview</b> -- "I am calling to confirm my interview scheduled at your company in 2 days. Could you please tell me where to find your office's accessible entrance?"
Educate the employer by articulating or demonstrating how you can perform the essential functions of the job. Have resource information available for the employer.	<b>During the Interview</b> -- Have you ever heard of a screen reader? I have a learning disability and have difficulty reading in the traditional way. My screen reader, which reads electronic information aloud using a computerized voice, has enabled me to succeed at college and I know it will be useful on this job."
Explain the benefits of your disability regarding your personal growth or perseverance.	<b>During the Interview</b> -- "Through my disability, I have learned the value of connecting with professionals. I can be resourceful and creative to get the job done."
Face employer concerns by talking about your compensatory strategies or accommodation solutions.	<b>During the Interview</b> -- "You may be wondering how I can type letters with my physical disability. I have a great software program that allows the computer to type as I speak words. It can be loaded on most computers. I would be happy to show it to you sometime."
Use general, functional terms to briefly explain the impact of your disability on the job; avoid technical, medical diagnoses.	<b>After the Job Offer</b> -- "During the interview, you explained that work was verbally assigned at a staff meeting. I find that I work best when instructions are both written and verbal. I have a disability that makes processing verbal information a challenge. Could you accommodate me in this way?"
In a private setting, remind your employer about your right to confidentiality.	<b>After the Job is Accepted</b> -- After disclosing your disability in your employer's office: "Thank you in advance for keeping this information confidential."
Frame the disclosure around how you work best.	<b>A Few Weeks on the Job</b> -- "I have noticed that I am having a difficult time completing my work assignments. I have a medical condition that requires frequent breaks in order to do my work. Would you allow me to work later to enable me to take more breaks? I always get the job done when I manage my schedule in this way."

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# Do's and Don'ts of Disclosure

## Job Accommodation Network

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### Effective Accommodation Practices (EAP) Series

### Dos and Don'ts of Disclosure

Job Accommodation Network  
PO Box 6080  
Morgantown, WV 26506-6080  
(800)526-7234 (V)  
(877)781-9403 (TTY)  
jan@askjan.org  
askjan.org



A service of the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy

### INTERVIEWING TIPS FOR APPLICANTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS (ASD)

Home / Publications / Consultant

Consultants' Corner: Volume 10, Issue 01

From the desk of [Melanie Whetzel, M.A., CBIS](#), Lead Consultant –  
Cognitive/Neurological Team

#### Interviewing

Interviewing for a job can be a very stressful experience for anyone looking for employment, but for job applicants with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) who may have social difficulties, the experience can be paralyzing. This kind of social anxiety could cause individuals to freeze up and be unable to think on the spot, and ultimately be unable to respond in ways that communicate their knowledge and experience.

This article is intended to assist job applicants with ASD in positively representing themselves and their abilities, and to help employers understand the kinds of accommodations that can be made during the job interview process so that individuals with ASD can do their best to represent themselves and their skills. The information and tips included here will also be useful to employment specialists, job coaches, parents, and anyone else who is involved in assisting individuals with ASD do their best when it comes to job interviewing skills and practices.

#### Disclosure

One interviewing question that job applicants with ASD have relates to disclosure. Disclosure is the divulging or giving out of specific, personal information about a disability. When disclosing as part of an accommodation request, it is important to provide information about the nature of the disability, the limitations involved, and how the disability affects the ability to participate in the interview process.

It is a good idea for job seekers to have a strategy, which simply means that they will want to think about disclosure ahead of time and have a plan about when and how much information they are willing to disclose. This strategy could also include having the medical information from their doctors or health care providers so that the accommodation request and disclosure can be substantiated with the facts. Applicants should provide any accommodation suggestions that they have as well.



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- [Knowledge](#)
- [Preparation](#)
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- [Confidence](#)

# Preparing Autistic People for Job Interviews

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- Interviewers have a very specific set of things they look for and judge candidates on.
- Autistic behaviors can be misinterpreted as not trustworthy or distracting
- Open-ended questions are difficult to gauge
- Skills-based interviews vs. question-based interviews

# Preparing Autistic People for Job Interviews

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## Job Accommodation Network Accommodation Ideas:

- Requesting fewer interviewers
- Requesting that the first interview be conducted by phone
- Requesting a copy of the interview questions to be provided in advance
- Requesting that the interview occur at a specific time of day can also be an accommodation.

# Unpacking “Openly Autistic”

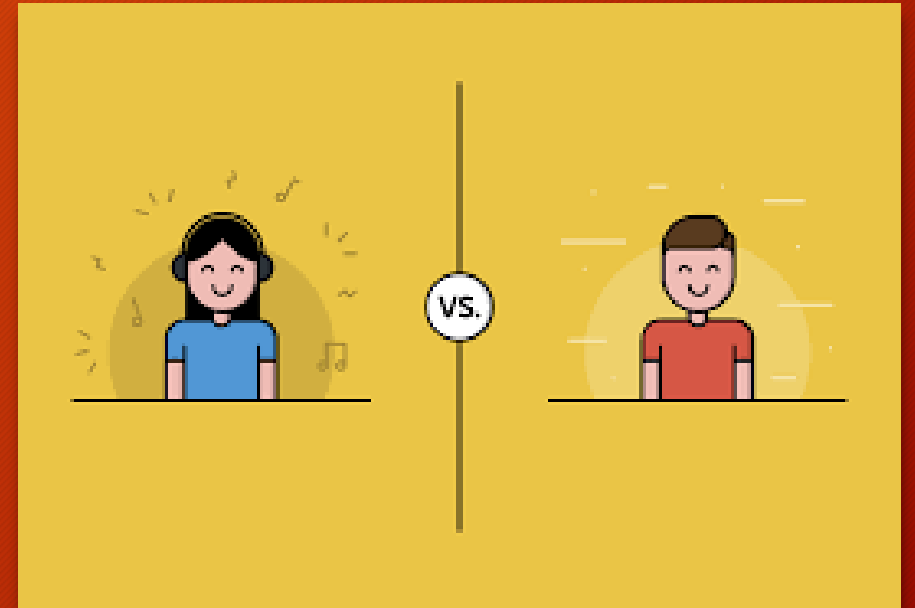
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“To me, being 'openly autistic' means not having to hide or mask my autism; it is the freedom to be exactly who I am.”

# Accessibility and Accommodations

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- Employers think a lot of accommodations would cause undue hardship
- Accommodations generally cost \$500 or less (Job Accommodation Network)
- What do accommodations look like for autistic people?
- How to go about getting accommodations



# The Shift Towards Self-Advocacy

# What is Self-Advocacy?

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- Self-advocacy is both a set of skills and a movement
- Self-advocacy skills empower people with disabilities to make choices that affect their daily lives and allow for greater independence
- “Self-advocacy - as a personal and political philosophy - is a movement primarily of and by [people with disabilities] who are making their own decisions, speaking for themselves and for others with disabilities, and taking control over their lives.”



# I'm Not a Self-Advocate. What Can I Do?

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- Parents, professionals, and employers can also encourage self-advocacy in respective settings
- Can be as simple as someone saying, “I don’t feel comfortable” and respecting boundaries
- At work, it can be learning someone’s needs: “I need to take a break.”
- In school, can apply to all students
  - “I Wish My Teacher Knew...” hashtag and conversation

# Disclosing and Requesting Accommodations as Self-Advocacy

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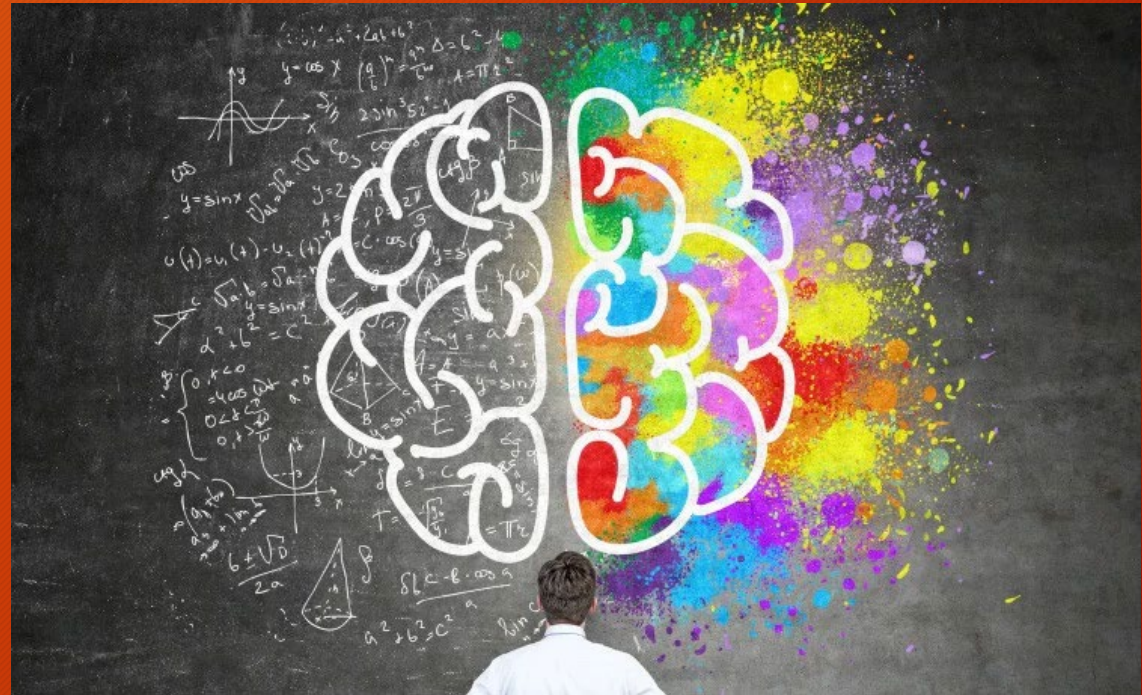
- Frame accommodations as a conversation to empower both employers and employees
  - “I work best when...”
- Deciding who needs to know
- Pros and cons
- Advocating for accommodation solutions and workplace policies

# The Future of Neurodiversity at Work

# What Does the Future Look Like?

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- Neurodiverse leadership
- Further collaboration
- Inclusive culture
- Aligning people to strengths
  - All across the spectrum



# Neurodiverse Leadership

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- Autistic people want long-term careers, not just jobs
- Provide opportunities to allow employees to grow
- Should be part of executive teams and leadership
- Paying it forward - what if we have neurodiverse hiring teams and interviewers?

# A Culture of Acceptance and Inclusion

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- Starts from the top down with openness and vulnerability
- Employee resource/interest groups
- Aligning people to their strengths
- Open communication
- Shifting the autism training focuses from autistic employees to company-wide trainings
  - Best: having autistic people lead these conversations

# Focus on the Strengths

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Focus on the Strengths

**AUTISM SPEAKS**

- Attention to detail**
  - Thoroughness
  - Accuracy
- Deep focus**
  - Concentration
  - Freedom from distraction
- Observational skills**
  - Listen, look, learn approach
  - Fact finding
- Absorb and retain facts**
  - Excellent long term memory
  - Superior recall
- Visual skills**
  - Visual learning and recall
  - Detail-focussed
- Expertise**
  - In-depth knowledge
  - High level of skills
- Methodical approach**
  - Analytical
  - Spotting patterns, repetition
- Novel approaches**
  - Unique thought processes
  - Innovative solutions
- Creativity**
  - Distinctive imagination
  - Expression of ideas
- Tenacity and resilience**
  - Determination
  - Challenge opinions
- Accepting of difference**
  - Less likely to judge others
  - May question norms
- Integrity**
  - Honesty, loyalty
  - Commitment

Credit: Harriet Cannon  
Disability Services, February 2018

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# Let's Continue the Conversation

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- Facebook: [facebook.com/haleymossart](https://facebook.com/haleymossart)
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- Email: [haley@haleymoss.net](mailto:haley@haleymoss.net)