



Supporting your autistic employees to work remotely

It is a common misconception that all individuals on the autism spectrum will thrive & feel comfortable when required to work from home. Although many individuals may relish this new opportunity, other individuals may struggle, feel overwhelmed and disengaged. Stereotypically, individuals on the spectrum thrive with regular structure and routine but as a result of working remotely they may require additional assistance to re-establish their new routine at home.

As such, asking your autistic employee the right questions in order to support them is very important during these unprecedented times and it is particularly important not to make any assumptions. Instead, ensure you set up open communication channels and that you ask your autistic employees specific questions in order to find out how you can best support them and to ensure they thrive within their new work environment.

Virtual connectivity is key to success. Consider if your autistic employees have the tools they need to successfully work from home?

- Can they access a reliable internet connection? Do they have adequate internet data or are they tethering from their mobile phone?
- Do they have the ability to print or scan documents if required?
- Can they access collaborative tools such as Slack, Zoom, Skype or messenger?
- Can they access the organisations intranet and secure storage drives?

Consider any sensory sensitivities and their work environment. Many individuals on the autism spectrum experience sensory processing issues and this can impact the individual in a number of ways. It is important to ask your autistic employee:

- Do they have access to a quiet work environment? Do they share their home or room with a flat mate or children which may cause disruptions?
- Would they benefit from noise cancelling headphones?
- Does their work environment have adequate natural light?
- Are they working from a solid work surface such as a desk or kitchen bench or are they working from their bed or sofa?
- Do they require flexibility in their work due to home schooling children or caring for other family members?

Consider the individuals preferred method of communication. Many individuals on the spectrum may not feel comfortable verbally participating in group teleconferences as too many visual or auditory stimuli at once may cause stress. As such, it is important to consider their preferred means of communication in order to ensure they feel comfortable in raising any questions or concerns.

- What are the individuals preferred methods of communication? Would they prefer to communicate with their Manager 1:1 via email, telephone, Messenger or another telecommunications tool?
- How often do you need to check in with your employee? Good practice here is to establish an agreed and transparent schedule for your employee outlining when and how you will check in with your employee. Calendar invites are great as they are visual and typically provide reminders prior to meeting start times
- Would your employee benefit from short daily check-ins to allocate daily tasks and to provide an opportunity to clarify any questions they may have? It's also good practice here to provide your employee with guidelines on how long you



expect it should take them to complete any assigned tasks given they may not be in their usual working environment

- Be clear to reinforce how your employee might seek clarity and have questions answered when faced with a challenge. Good practice here again is to be clear about how they can communicate with you when something pops up and where they need clarification on. If it's OK with you to receive an email seeking clarification ad-hoc, be sure to let them know this. If your preference for them to save any questions for the regular, scheduled check ins, be sure they are also aware of this.
- Consider also how would they might like to receive feedback?

Maintaining well-being and emotional health is critical. Is it important to ask your autistic employee how they are feeling and how the current situation in regards to COVID-19 is affecting them? As autism is a co-morbid condition some individuals may be experiencing heightened levels of anxiety and stress during this time.

- Ask the individual what hours they are working each day? Are they stopping for adequate breaks?
- Is the individual eating a balanced diet or relying on heavily processed foods?
- Is the individual getting an adequate amount of fresh air and exercise? Ask them when they last left their house?
- Is the individual sleeping well or are they having difficulty due to increased anxiety and/or changes in their routine?
- Provide the individual with the details of services they can utilise such as the internal Employee Assistance Program (EAP), Lifeline, Beyond Blue and Black Dog.
- Connect employees with HR and direct them to relevant policies and procedures. Consider if the individual is aware of their entitlements should they become unfit for work or are required to care for other family member.

Should you have any further questions about how to ensure your autistic employees thrive whilst working remotely or in regards to any of Specialisterne's services please feel free to reach out and contact me.

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