

Autism Spectrum Disorders— Workplace Issues and Employment Strategies

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National TATRA Conference
PACER
March 26, 2009

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OBJECTIVES

- Thinking ahead about employment preparation and steps to take to be ready for the “real job”
- Identifying key points related to the Americans with Disabilities Act
- Determining effective accommodations and workplace strategies
- Discussing the role of employment supports

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EMPLOYMENT PREPARATION AND STEPS TO TAKE TO BE READY FOR THE “REAL JOB”

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Steps to Take:

- Job shadows
- Job try outs/situational assessments
- Mentorship opportunities
- Internships
- Continued dialogue with supports (i.e. Voc. Rehab., job coaches, evaluators, family,) about what further strategies, supports or development of skills are needed

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KEY POINTS RELATED TO THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT (ADA)

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ADA Definition of a Disability

The ADA definition of an individual with a disability is a person who:

- Has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; or limits one or more major bodily functions
- Has a record of such an impairment; or
- Is regarded as having such an impairment.

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Substantially Limited in a Major Life Activity

- ✓ Hearing
- ✓ Seeing
- ✓ Speaking
- ✓ Breathing
- ✓ Performing manual tasks
- ✓ Walking
- ✓ Sleeping
- ✓ Standing
- ✓ Sitting
- ✓ Caring for oneself
- ✓ Learning
- ✓ Concentrating
- ✓ Lifting
- ✓ Thinking
- ✓ Interacting with others
- ✓ Reaching
- ✓ Working

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A Qualified Individual with a Disability

A *qualified employee or applicant* with a disability is an individual who, with or without reasonable accommodation, can perform the essential functions of the job in question.

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Essential Functions Could Include:

- Physical demands
- Cognitive/mental demands
- Some employers will stress essential functions such as interacting effectively in a team, working independently, managing multiple projects, etc.
- It is up to the employer to decide what is essential.

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Nondisclosure

vs.

Disclosure Issues

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Autism Related Court Case

- Taylor vs Food World, Inc. (11th Circuit)

The employer was required to consider accommodations, even though the employee did not expressly request one, because the company was aware of his disability and the need for accommodation was clear, but the very nature of his disability prevented him from recognizing that need.

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Employee's (and Support Person's) Role with Disclosure

To determine how the employee's disability impacts him/her in performing the functions of their job (referred to as "functional limitations") and to disclose those limitations which are comfortable and relevant to getting the accommodations needed

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Employer's Role with Disclosure

To guide the individual, if necessary, to be more appropriate when they disclose—"What I would need to know is how your disability affects your ability to do your job and do you need anything (i.e. accommodations) to perform effectively in your position?"

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Resources Used to Get Functional Limitation Information

- The individual/employee
- The employee's doctor or medical professional
- School/transition staff
- Individual/employee's support staff
- A job site analysis through an internal or external source—using the employee's input, medical information and feedback from the employer

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Documentation of the Functional Limitation Information

- Employers have a right to get medical documentation--but it should be held confidential and in a separate medical file.
- If the employer is obtaining this information directly, it is necessary that they include a signed release and a job description which lays out the essential functions.

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Documentation of the Functional Limitation Information

- Types of documentation:
 - A letter from the employee's doctor/medical professional
 - A company ADA request form
 - An employer letter addressing specific questions for the doctor/medical professional to answer

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EFFECTIVE ACCOMMODATIONS AND WORKPLACE STRATEGIES

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EMPLOYEE'S AND EMPLOYER'S ROLE WITH ACCOMMODATIONS

To determine what accommodations are needed (it is an interactive process)

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Resources for Accommodations

- Job Accommodation Network.....1-800-526-7234 (www.jan.wvu.edu)
- MRC Staying On the Job.....612-752-8118 (www.mrc-mn.org)
- Autism Society or other related community organizations (www.autism-society.org)
- Medical professionals
- School staff
- Rehabilitation Services/Vocational Rehabilitation
- Disability specialists or advocates

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Accommodation Ideas

Difficulty interacting with others

- Explaining and possibly writing down the unwritten rules of the workplace/ environment
- Bringing in a job coach to help interpret nonverbal communication and/or define appropriate and inappropriate exchanges
- Modeling appropriate communication through training, role playing or demonstration videos

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Accommodation Ideas

Difficulty interacting with others

- Holding brief daily or weekly meetings with supervisor to discuss workplace issues and communication
- Addressing performance issues as it happens
- Having one individual talk at a time, at meetings, and encouraging this with everyday interactions

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Accommodation Ideas

Difficulty interacting with others

- Providing communicating via one-on-one or e-mail based on the individual's preferences and their best way of processing information
- Not using sarcasm, abstract phrases, hints, etc.
- Ensuring one person, when possible, to get directions from (rather than multiple)

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Accommodation Ideas

Difficulty with communication/ speaking

- Accessing augmentative communication devices
- Determining the employee's most effective means of communication and using this when possible
- Talking about the proper flow of communication

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Accommodation Ideas

Difficulty with communication/speaking

- Identifying expectations for what things need to be communicated (on a daily, weekly or as needed basis) and any preferred method to do so
- Being aware that eye contact may not always be something that comes easy for individuals with ASD
- Allowing the employee some time to respond
- Being brief and concrete

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Accommodation Ideas

Difficulty with communication/ speaking

- Providing a supportive environment that allows for a discussion about communication issues or challenges the employee faces
- Educating co-workers (if possible) on ASD and identifying different approaches to effective communication

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Accommodation Ideas

Difficulty with learning, concentrating, and thinking

- Implementing multi-sensory approaches when training (see it, hear it, do it)
- Introducing pictorial approaches to learn tasks or processes
- Drafting checklists or written procedures

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Accommodation Ideas

Difficulty with learning, concentrating, and thinking

- Using aids such as planner, computer reminder system, etc to keep employee on track with duties
- Ensuring working environment is suitable, with limited distractions (i.e. noise levels, lighting, odors, etc.)

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Accommodation Ideas

Difficulty with learning, concentrating, and thinking

- Breaking large projects into smaller steps
- Visual cues
- Using timers/watches
- Accessing job coach
- Putting together agendas for meeting

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Accommodation Ideas

Difficulty with change (due to inflexibility)

- Communicating as soon as possible any changes that will be occurring and how things will proceed
- Having weekly meetings or open it up to email exchanges to discuss how the individual is handling change

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Accommodation Ideas

Difficulty with change (due to inflexibility)

- Allowing some space for individual to have own routines and organization systems, as long as they result in their ability to meet the expectations of the job

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Accommodation Ideas

Difficulty with stress

- Defining stress for the individual to see if it can be accommodated
- Allowing the employee to take breaks to deal with stress
- Identifying locations to retreat if overloaded with sensory stimuli

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ROLE OF EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS

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Employment supports are critical to a person with ASDs success

- To provide education about the disability or communication needs of the individual to the employer or workgroup
- To coach the individual on strategies that work best with their learning and communication style
- To develop effective work routines that allow the essential functions to get done

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Employment supports are critical to a person with ASDs success

- To intervene in circumstances where there was a nonverbal or verbal misunderstanding
- To determine if there are any funding needs for adaptive devices to enhance communication
- To explain any apparent or "odd" behaviors
- Etc.

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Henry Ford
"Before everything else,
getting ready is the secret
to success."

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Questions



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