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Top autism tips: employment -reasonable adjustments for employers

Top Tip 1: What is a reasonable adjustment?

As an employer, you have a responsibility to make reasonable adjustments to the workplace if you have a disabled employee working for you or potentially working for you. That means you can be expected to make reasonable adjustments to the recruitment process, to the physical environment, to where and when an employee works, and it might include accessing things like training for you or the employee or Access to Work support person. You can access a workplace assessment, via Access to Work, which will help you create a bespoke plan to decide the adjustments needed for your specific employee.

Top Tip 2: What do employers need to know about reasonable adjustments and performance difficulties?

If your employee is having performance difficulties and they have a diagnosis of autism, we would recommend that you access specialist support guidance before going through a work capability assessment. Often performance difficulties can be due to things like communication issues, or sensory needs. By accessing a workplace assessment, you're able to see where the needs are, and how to find the solutions to work with them. This doesn't mean that your employees are exempt from receiving negative feedback, or feedback on parts of the role that they're unable to do – but that when they do receive it, it's viewed through the lens of their autism and you're able to support them appropriately through this.

Top Tip 3: What do employers need to know about environmental adjustments?

Often autistic people will experience sensory sensitivities that are impacted by their environmental surroundings. These include things like noise, the sound of colleagues talking; taste, certain foods; touch, being touched to get their attention in the office; smell, the smell of

a colleague's perfume or maybe their hot lunch at dinnertime; and lights, the lighting surrounding their desk area or working environment. Often autistic people find it really hard to know what their sensory sensitivities are. So you can help them find them out by doing things like looking at body language – are they squirming? Do they avoid certain parts of the office? – or by asking specific questions such as “What’s the lighting like at home?” You might also notice that your employee complains a lot of headaches or being tired when they’re sat at their desk. Some common adjustments that you can use for sensory sensitivities include noise-cancelling headphones, moving the desk to a quieter location, or altering the lighting.

Top Tip 4: What do employers need to know about other reasonable adjustments that need to be made?

Other common reasonable adjustments that you can make for your employee include things like giving them a buddy, or a mentor who can explain the nuances of your specific working environment; accessing support from a specialist workplace advisor; attending training for you, the employee, or their colleagues; or using assistive technology like Brain In Hand. You can also access a workplace assessment via the National Autistic Society. We'll come and meet with you, your employee and their colleagues, and provide you with a detailed workplace assessment report that creates bespoke suggestions of the adjustments that your employee needs.