

Inclusive Workplaces Discussion Tool:

An Accommodations Checklist for Autistic Employees

How this Tool Was Developed

Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work (CCRW) provided funding for a project to improve workplace support for Autistic employees. A working group composed Autistic self-advocates, caregivers (parents) of Autistic people, and subject matter experts was convened by Autism Alliance of Canada. This working group was tasked to consider the diversity of Autistic employee experiences and to develop a broad list of accommodations needs and solutions aimed at promoting workplace inclusivity for Autistic employees. While the term “accommodations” is standard language in most human resources settings, Autistic self-advocates have articulated a preference for shifting to language that emphasizes “inclusion” in the workplace. We have therefore titled this tool the *Inclusive Workplaces Discussion Tool*.

Instructions For Using the Tool

This Discussion Tool is intended to be used as a resource to support the “accommodations process,” involving discussions between the employer and Autistic employee aimed at reaching agreement on feasible changes that can be made in the workplace environment to promote inclusion, acceptance, functioning and workplace potential of the employee.

The tool includes two parts. First, on the next page, you will find a table that provides a list of recommended accommodations for a variety of accommodations needs the employee may have—organized by accommodation needs category, and then subcategory . This list can be used both by the employee, to understand the range of recognized accommodations needs that Autistic employees sometimes experience, and decide which ones are relevant to discuss in their case; and by the employer, to become aware of the possible challenges that Autistic adults can experience, and recommendations that serve as examples of modifications to consider when discussing specific needs with the employee as part of the accommodations process. Further customization of accommodations solutions to match unique



employee needs and context considerations is encouraged. Reviewing accommodations on a regular basis (at least annually) or as needed is also recommended.

Please note, this list does not cover the complete range of Autistic needs, and each Autistic employee will be unique. For this reason, this document may be updated to add new accommodations needs and recommendations in the future. Second, below the table is a section called *Implementation Considerations* that contains ideas to make the accommodations process more feasible for the employer and equitable for all. For more detail, please refer to Autism Alliance of Canada's white paper document, *Promoting Workplace Inclusivity: Improving the Accommodations Process for Autistic Employees*.

| Accommodations Needs Category | Accommodations Needs Subcategory | Recommended Adjustments/Accommodations |
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| <p>Sensory:</p> <p>Autistics can have heightened or attenuated sensitivity. Thus, sensory cues that are perceived as unpleasant by most can oftentimes be disabling for an Autistic employee on the spectrum; Sensory cues that are perceived as normal by most may also be too weak to make sense of. In both situations, this can result in decreased performance and a challenging work experience for the employee.</p> | Sound sensitivity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Supply noise-canceling headphones (over or in-ear as preferred by the employee) or allow the employee to use their own <input type="checkbox"/> Allow use of white noise machine in situations where hearing background noises is distracting to the employee <input type="checkbox"/> Offer priority seating away from high-traffic areas, preferably in a separate room <input type="checkbox"/> Provide training, a written guide, and a point person to employees for assistance with controlling the sound settings on workplace-related devices (i.e. telephone ringer can be turned off and replaced with flashing light, computer notifications can be muted, etc). <input type="checkbox"/> Allow the employee to take breaks in a sound-sensitive location <input type="checkbox"/> Allow employee to work remotely |
| | Temperature sensitivity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Allow employees to control the temperature (space heater, fan, blanket, sweaters, coats, gloves, etc.) <input type="checkbox"/> Allow for adaptation of a work uniform or dress code <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> In choosing uniforms, avoid scratchy materials (ex: wool), and use breathable materials (ex: cotton) <input type="checkbox"/> Allow employees with heat sensitivity to work earlier shifts if outdoors, to reduce exposure to hotter parts of the day <input type="checkbox"/> Provide umbrellas for shade in outdoor work situations <input type="checkbox"/> Allow employees to have hot/cold beverages at workstations <input type="checkbox"/> Allow the employee to take breaks in a setting where temperature is not impacted and/or can be controlled by the employee <input type="checkbox"/> Allow employee to work remotely |
| | Touch Sensitivity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Allow for adaptation of a work uniform or dress code |

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| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> In choosing uniforms, avoid materials such as wool when possible. Cotton is suggested given its breathability |
| | <p>Light sensitivity</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Allow addition of curtains and/or blinds <input type="checkbox"/> Offer lamps and overhead lighting with incandescent bulbs instead of fluorescent bulbs <input type="checkbox"/> Allow employee to wear sunglasses and/or a hat <input type="checkbox"/> Allow use of light boxes (light therapy lamps) <input type="checkbox"/> Replace/repair flickering lights within 24 hours to reduce risk of sensory reactions. If repair cannot be done in this timeframe, allow the employee to relocate away from the impacted area until it is remedied. <input type="checkbox"/> Provide computer monitors and other electronic devices that have a blue light mode (i.e. you can turn off blue light) or other dimming features. Ensure the employee is fully trained on how to use lighting features on all company electronic devices. If the employee has questions or runs into technical concerns, there should be a written and/or video guide available to them at all times or a person to ask. <input type="checkbox"/> Allow employee to work remotely <input type="checkbox"/> Allow employee to take breaks in a light-sensitive setting <input type="checkbox"/> Ensure building maintenance staff are adhering to the following standards for outdoor lighting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> For night workers or those who start or finish their day when it is dark, illumination levels outside should not be any more than 20% brighter than when the lights are on. <input type="checkbox"/> Outdoor lighting should be warm LED (not blue) and activated via motion sensors to reduce glare light pollution. LED provides lower luminescence without sacrificing visibility. <input type="checkbox"/> High lumen lighting (exceeding 2,500 lumens) should not be angled more than 90 degrees from straight down or be shielded to reduce light trespass or stray light. |

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| | | <input type="checkbox"/> Consider the use of dimmers and light timers as these help lower outdoor lighting levels. |
| | Scent sensitivity | <input type="checkbox"/> Create a workplace policy on using cleaning products that are scent-free or lowest scent possible <input type="checkbox"/> Create a scent-free workplace policy for all employees in which perfumes, scented personal care products, and other fragrant items may not be worn or applied at work <input type="checkbox"/> Allow employee to work remotely |
| | Food sensitivity | <input type="checkbox"/> Provide form to request provision of suitable options or advise of any potential/severe allergies in advance of company events where food is provided |
| Transportation and Workplace Accessibility | Parking | <input type="checkbox"/> Provide priority parking (available parking near workplace to avoid disorientation) <input type="checkbox"/> Offer marked parking spaces of which all employees have one assigned to them should they request one (i.e. parking spot 1, 2, etc). <input type="checkbox"/> Schedule shifts when public transit is most frequent to reduce stress of commuting. <input type="checkbox"/> Ask the employee as to what their usual commuting schedule and route is to allow for better accommodation of shift start and end times and to reduce anxiety |
| | Work location | <input type="checkbox"/> Provide options for on-site, remote and hybrid work |
| <p>Training supports for the Autistic employee:</p> <p>Training needs vary greatly between individuals. Here are</p> | Training type | <input type="checkbox"/> Ask the employee how they learn best (i.e. visual, auditory, etc) <input type="checkbox"/> Offer multiple forms of training <input type="checkbox"/> Offer kinesthetic/proprioceptive (i.e. hands on/muscle memory) forms of training <input type="checkbox"/> Offer visual forms of training (learning through the sense of sight, involving graphics, charts, coloured diagrams, visual presentations, written instructions, videos, written material, etc.) <input type="checkbox"/> Offer auditory forms of training (learning through the sense of hearing, involving aural instruction) |

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| some possible accommodations: | | <input type="checkbox"/> Ensure clear and concrete language is used <input type="checkbox"/> Ensure that pace of speaking in any recorded training can be sped up or slowed down as needed by the employee <input type="checkbox"/> Offer group training <input type="checkbox"/> Offer 1:1 training. If 1:1 training cannot be offered, the employee should be provided with a mentor to speak to in addition to group training. <input type="checkbox"/> Offer in-person training <input type="checkbox"/> Offer virtual synchronous training <input type="checkbox"/> Offer virtual asynchronous training |
| | Training pace | <input type="checkbox"/> Advise the employee that training can be slowed down or sped up as needed <input type="checkbox"/> Train on one task at a time (as required by the employee) <input type="checkbox"/> Break each task into smaller steps to teach each step <input type="checkbox"/> Ensure that one task is mastered and that the employee is comfortable before moving to the next one |
| | Training duration | <input type="checkbox"/> Break up training into 1-hour blocks or less with breaks in between <input type="checkbox"/> Allow for a longer initial/ongoing training period until all job tasks are mastered to the employee's and employer's comfort and satisfaction. <input type="checkbox"/> Allow access to a mentor post-training |
| | Training refreshers | <input type="checkbox"/> Provide take-home points and summary bullet points at the end of training. <input type="checkbox"/> Provide a written form that can be referred to after the training <input type="checkbox"/> Provide visual and auditory references in advance of training and after training <input type="checkbox"/> Advise of training schedule (date and times), training place, training topic, and all expectations for training as soon as they are known but at least 48 hours in advance of training start time |
| | Additional/repeated training | <input type="checkbox"/> Provide training on workplace, department and team rules with attention to non-written or implicit rules |

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| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Clarify situations or contexts where rules can be overlooked. <input type="checkbox"/> Ensure that all communication is clearly written and articulated. <input type="checkbox"/> Ensure that the employees knows who to contact if they have questions or concerns <input type="checkbox"/> Advise of training schedule (date and times), training place, training topic, and all expectations for training as soon as they are known but at least 48 hours in advance of training start time |
| <p>Supervisor and Colleague support</p> <p>The following accommodations can allow the Autistic employee to offer the expected work performance.</p> | <p>Supervision instruction (type, pace)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Ensure that the supervisor has had training on autism <input type="checkbox"/> Support employee with task prioritization <input type="checkbox"/> Support employee with chunking larger tasks (i.e., breaking down large tasks into smaller pieces) <input type="checkbox"/> Offer scheduled time for Q&A and clarification <input type="checkbox"/> Ensure the employee is aware of who to/what to consult for any questions/concerns at all times. <input type="checkbox"/> Discuss timelines and due dates with the employee and agree mutually on what is appropriate <input type="checkbox"/> Allow time extensions on deadlines/due dates where appropriate <input type="checkbox"/> Provide clear and concise written instructions that the employee can refer back to <input type="checkbox"/> Provide aural instructions: auditory recording and/or video of steps and instructions for job tasks <input type="checkbox"/> Provide visual instructions: videos with subtitles, demonstrations in-person (see and do), written instructions/readings, etc. |
| | <p>Supervision schedule (pace of checking in)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Arrange for regular check-ins on recurring basis (weekly, biweekly, or as agreed - fill in details below) <input type="checkbox"/> Discuss with the employee as to their preference with check-ins - would they prefer weekly, biweekly, monthly, etc. |
| | <p>Supervision type (type and</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Provide a mentor who works with the employee and with the supervisor to assist |

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| | duration of checking in) | with job skill development and workplace support as needed. |
| | Autism acceptance training for colleagues (Promoting positive attitudes) | <input type="checkbox"/> Provide books and printouts of autism acceptance blog posts (with author permission) within the break room <input type="checkbox"/> In team/group meetings, discuss autism and neurodiversity acceptance using blog posts, books, videos, news articles, personal experiences (as volunteered), etc. <input type="checkbox"/> Consult with Autistic employees (provided they have identified themselves), CCRW and/or another organization in creating appropriate training materials for employees <input type="checkbox"/> Have a public speaker come in to discuss autism in the workplace with all employees <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Ensure to consult with autistic employees and other neurodivergent employees prior to having a speaker come into the workplace to ensure the speaker is credible and will not promote further discrimination within the workplace <input type="checkbox"/> If a public speaker cannot come in due to the nature of the workplace, create a neurodiversity presentation in collaboration with an organization such as Autism Alliance of Canada, CCRW, Ready Willing and Able, etc. |
| | Mentorship Accommodations | <input type="checkbox"/> Set up a buddy system in the workplace where the Autistic employee can go to ask for guidance and support <input type="checkbox"/> Provide a mentor who works with the employee and with the supervisor to assist with job skill development and workplace supports as needed |
| Social/Communication | Communication style | <input type="checkbox"/> Use a direct, concrete and pragmatic communication style, without innuendo (avoid sarcasm), abstract (intangible concepts), or ambiguity (avoid jargon and words with multiple meanings), as Autistics tend to understand words that are said at face-value <input type="checkbox"/> Have patience and understand that some Autistics will ask many questions because they have a greater need for clarity. Avoid misinterpreting this as refusal |

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| | | <p>to work, or insubordination.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Understand that some Autistics can be direct or overly honest in their communication style, which may be inappropriate in some contexts (e.g., resulting in perceived but unintended disrespect to a client). Rather than discipline the employee, take time to explain in literal terms how their words were inappropriate and how to communicate (or avoid communicating) more appropriately in the future |
| | Team socialization | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Respect communication needs when assigning tasks, following-up, giving feedback, or sharing relevant information <input type="checkbox"/> Provide choice to participate in team socialization (option to opt-out) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Do not stigmatize against workers who do not want to socialize <input type="checkbox"/> Even if an employee chooses to opt out once, always offer them the choice to participate every time unless the employee states otherwise |
| | Meeting participation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Offer the option to attend virtually or in-person <input type="checkbox"/> Allow employee to write comments to be read aloud by a pre-designated person <input type="checkbox"/> Do not force the employee to participate verbally <input type="checkbox"/> Ensure that “games” that may occur in the meeting such as for means of getting to know others, etc are appropriate and allow the employees not to participate if they do not feel comfortable doing so <input type="checkbox"/> Allow employee to take notes as needed <input type="checkbox"/> Allow employee to record session provided other team members are comfortable <input type="checkbox"/> If meeting is virtual, ensure employee has access to subtitles, etc <input type="checkbox"/> If meeting is virtual, allow cameras to be turned on or off as preferred by the employee. <input type="checkbox"/> If meeting is virtual, turn on the chat feature to allow employees to communicate this way if they choose <input type="checkbox"/> If the employee is not comfortable with group meetings, offer a one-to-one meeting separately to discuss the topics of the group meeting |

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| Meetings | Meeting Prep and Follow-up | <input type="checkbox"/> Provide advance (at least 48 hours notice preferably) written notice of discussion topics/agenda <input type="checkbox"/> Provide extra time to formulate thoughts: never put employees on the spot <input type="checkbox"/> Allow the employee the opportunity to follow-up post-meeting with any questions/concerns/clarification <input type="checkbox"/> Schedule non-regular meetings as far in advance as possible to allow mental preparation but provide at least 48 hours notice <input type="checkbox"/> Provide a written follow-up to the meeting (such as an e-mail) with all topics discussed and any additional questions, information to follow-up on |
| | Memory-aids | <input type="checkbox"/> Allow video recording, audiotaping and note taking |
| Work Schedule | | <input type="checkbox"/> Offer flexible work hours <input type="checkbox"/> Offer part-time work schedule <input type="checkbox"/> Offer additional breaks (dependent upon individual needs) |
| Work Area | Workspace | <input type="checkbox"/> Offer priority seating either away from high-traffic areas or preferably in a separate room (if required) <input type="checkbox"/> Permit fidget items to be used at workstation to assist in focus <input type="checkbox"/> Provide a quiet and separate space for break periods <input type="checkbox"/> Provide visible, clear and up to date checklists for specific tasks (to be displayed or portable) |
| | Equipment | <input type="checkbox"/> Provide ergonomic standing desks <input type="checkbox"/> Provide ergonomic chairs <input type="checkbox"/> Provide ergonomic monitors <input type="checkbox"/> Allow the use of smartphone apps such as timers for reminders and voice to note taking <input type="checkbox"/> Allow for employees to inform of any additional equipment that they require for accommodation |

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| Technology | Organizational tools | <input type="checkbox"/> Provide Evernote (record verbal instructions/lists) <input type="checkbox"/> Supply Post-it notes <input type="checkbox"/> Provide training and assistance to the employee with setting up and management of electronic calendars <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Provide a whiteboard (and markers/eraser) where applicable. <input type="checkbox"/> Perhaps a shared digital calendar with calendar invites |
| | Accessibility Tools | <input type="checkbox"/> Provide a tablet with the following apps (not exhaustive): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> "I sketch" (with stylus for note taking) <input type="checkbox"/> "zoomtext" (background and increased font size) <input type="checkbox"/> "evernote" (voice recorder) <input type="checkbox"/> Point person to teach/troubleshoot accessibility apps <input type="checkbox"/> Hard-copy and printed copies <input type="checkbox"/> Video and visual format of providing instructions <input type="checkbox"/> Closed captioned training videos to assist those with auditory processing issues <input type="checkbox"/> Instructions in fonts that are more easily read by people with learning disabilities (may be comorbid with autism) |
| Task management and quality control | Task organization | <input type="checkbox"/> Offer all tasks, details, and instructions in direct and clearly worded oral and/or written forms <input type="checkbox"/> Provide electronic reminders for meetings, deadlines, etc. <input type="checkbox"/> Establish point person for beginning tasks, seeking clarification, prompting next steps and reporting the completion of tasks <input type="checkbox"/> Provide fillable to do lists <input type="checkbox"/> Provide a checklist with steps to follow for completeness of task and to ensure good quality <input type="checkbox"/> Allow employees to complete one task before being handed a new task |

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| Performance Feedback | | <input type="checkbox"/> Clearly communicate strengths and areas of improvement fairly and consistently with actionable steps <input type="checkbox"/> Provide guidance, feedback and positive reinforcement <input type="checkbox"/> Deliver feedback in both oral, written, and/or video/audio recorded format |
| Expert External Support | Human supports | <input type="checkbox"/> Allow 1:1 support workers and/or job coaches to support the employee throughout the day |
| | Service animals | <input type="checkbox"/> Allow service animal accommodations and inform employees that service animals are not pets |
| Mental health accommodations | | <input type="checkbox"/> Partner with an EAP (employee assistance program) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Ensure all employees are aware of their EAP <input type="checkbox"/> If no EAP is available in the workplace, provide the employee with a list of crisis contacts and resources within their community and at the national level (i.e. 1-800 hotlines, websites, etc.) <input type="checkbox"/> Clearly identify which person/department for employee to approach if they need mental health assistance <input type="checkbox"/> Create a clear and sufficiently detailed return-to-work plan to help the employee know what to expect and do after returning from a leave of absence |
| Job description | Adjustments | <input type="checkbox"/> Focus on employee strengths to create a job description where the employee will perform best. Redistribute all remaining tasks within the team, accordingly. |
| | Job carving | <input type="checkbox"/> Collaborate with an external resource to create a job description specific to an individual's strengths and support needs that meet the organization's need |

Implementation Considerations:

The following *Implementation Considerations* provide ideas to make the accommodations process more feasible for the employer and equitable for all. For more detail, please refer to Autism Alliance of Canada's white paper document, *Promoting Workplace Inclusivity: Improving the Accommodations Process for Autistic Employees*.

RECOMMENDATION #1: Employers should begin by asking the Autistic employee to identify up to 5 accommodations that they require immediately.

RECOMMENDATION #2: Employers should offer structured, regular check-ins with the Autistic employee to gauge the effectiveness of the negotiated accommodation(s).

RECOMMENDATION #3: Employers must proactively educate and reframe workplace attitudes and understandings toward accommodations.

RECOMMENDATION #4: Employers should offer customized work to Autistic employees.

RECOMMENDATION #5: If external "expert" resources (e.g., job coaches or other consultants) are engaged to facilitate the accommodations process, employers should exercise a high degree of caution and due diligence to engage someone qualified to address the unique needs of the Autistic employee.

Autism Alliance of Canada

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