

Top 5 autism tips: employment - disclosing an autism diagnosis to employers

1. Telling your employer about your diagnosis

I think telling an employer about your diagnosis is a really personal and sensitive decision. You might be worried about negative stereotyping/discrimination, but in our experience we found it a really useful experience. It means that the employee and the employer can work together and put in reasonable adjustments, but also really concentrate and focus on the employee's strengths.

2. Worrying about discrimination

I think a lot of employees do worry about whether or not to disclose their condition because of potential discrimination. I think a lot of people might worry about whether they'll be selected for an interview, whether they'll be successful and secure in the position, and whether they'll be professionally developed in the same way as their colleagues. I think this is because of, you know, traditionally and in the past there's been a focus on the negatives to do with autism and the condition in the workplace, but really now we're focusing on the positives and what that could bring to the workplace and the potential employer. It may be that an employer just doesn't have that information available so providing fact sheets and information about your diagnosis and what it means for you and how they can support you is really useful.

3. Useful information to provide

So I think it's really useful to provide information about your strengths due to your condition, but also to remember that your employer doesn't know what you need in terms of support. So we'd recommend using a disclosure template and outlining your strengths but also practising some of those areas that you have difficulty in – for example, you might need more detailed information about a task or instruction, or you might have difficulty making eye contact. So we've got a very useful disclosure template that can be used that's available on our website, and this is really useful to provide the employer.

4. How to provide information if you haven't worked before

I think if you're finding it difficult to know what information to provide to an employer because you haven't worked before, it can be really helpful to think about some of the support you might have received in school, college or university. For example, you might have had a steady mentor, or been provided with clear timetables. I think

it can also be really helpful to ask somebody who knows you really well. This could be a close friend, or a relative, or a partner that will usually have a really good insight into your strengths, and also some of the areas that you may need some support in.

5. What to do if you've told your employer and are still having difficulties

If you've told your employers about the difficulties you're experiencing in the workplace and you've disclosed your condition, usually we'd advise that this is done in an e-mail to your line manager, and bullet point your information that you want to discuss. If you're still having difficulties at that point, it can be really useful to provide your employer with some information on the services that are available to support both themselves and you in the workplace to address those issues. Some of the services that are available are workplace assessments to identify reasonable adjustments; training for your colleagues; training for your manager and for yourself around your condition and some of the difficulties that you might be having.