



## ADVICE FOR CO-WORKERS

The most useful way to support an individual with autism in the work place is to increase your knowledge and understanding of autism. A basic introduction to autism can be found at [www.ASDinfoWales.co.uk/ASDaware](http://www.ASDinfoWales.co.uk/ASDaware).

### Social Interaction

Many individuals with ASD find interacting with others on a social level quite stressful. They often struggle to see the point of 'social chit chat' or find it difficult to work out what is expected of them in social situations. The individual may struggle to 'see things from another's point of view' or to predict how someone might be feeling, or how they will react. These difficulties can mean that the individual appears 'socially awkward' or makes mistakes or even avoids social interaction because of these issues. Some things that may help:

- Avoid hypothetical conversations and social chit chat, make conversations purposeful and focus on facts and interests.
- Don't assume the individual is deliberately being rude or offensive, most social mistakes are due to a lack of understanding.
- Recognise the individual's wishes and interests, don't force to attend parties or after work drinks etc.
- Explain social expectations, don't assume your colleague will know what to wear or how to act in new or unusual work situations.

### Social Communication

Individuals with ASD have impairments in communication. This means that they often do not understand the nuances of communication such as the use of facial expression, body language, tone of voice, figurative language or eye contact. Some things that may help:

- Use literal language, say what you mean and avoid idiom or metaphor.
- Be precise, if you mean you will help when you have finished your current activity, explain that. Do not use phrases like 'in a minute' or 'I'll help you later'.

- Use language to express yourself rather than relying on body language or tone of voice to share emotion.
- Allow the individual to avoid eye contact if they wish, it probably makes them feel more comfortable.
- Break down long instructions into shorter ones, support with notes or lists.

### **Predictability and Routines**

Most individuals find changes difficult and prefer the predictable structure and routines. Some things that may help:

- Be understanding of the individual's need for predictable routines, even if they seem odd to you.
- Do not move items or furniture without discussing it with the individual first.
- Be aware that changes to staff, management structure or systems can cause anxiety – be supportive.
- Use calendars, timetables and planners to support the individual.

### **Sensory issues**

Some individuals with autism have unusual responses to sensory stimuli. This means that they may be more or less aware of stimuli such as noise, lighting, touch and smells. Some things that may help:

- Check with the individual before opening windows or turning heating on.
- Be aware that noisy environments can be distracting, and may mean that the individual struggles to focus on tasks or conversations.
- Fluorescent lighting or flickering lights can be problematic, check with the individual.
- Keep the environment free of clutter and distractions where possible.
- Be aware that sudden loud noises such as fire alarms can be distressing.

Individuals with autism can be trusted and supportive co-workers, with some additional support and understanding their experience of the workplace can be enhanced.