

Employment and ASD



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What is ASD?

- ASD is more than just “social shyness”.
- ASD = a smaller information intake channel.
- We are constantly overwhelmed by too many: sights, sounds, smells, textures, movements, body messages, thoughts and emotions.



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The environment is crucial

- I don't suffer from autism; I suffer from intolerance of difference.
- In a good situation, with understanding people, I am not “disabled” by my autism.
- In another situation, trying my hardest, things won't work out.



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Who can work?

- Not everyone on the spectrum can or should work.
- Who CAN work is not a matter of intelligence.
- Some have too severe autism. Some are too badly damaged by society and have serious mental health problems.



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What we are good at

- Accuracy
- Attention to detail and being thorough
- Diligence and high quality work
- Creating and following systems
- Less work time spent on social chat
- Following written instructions
- Focus – intense concentration on one thing.
- Being logical
- Rote memory
- Computer programming, maths and sciences?
- Foreign languages?



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What we are not good at

- Being concise (e.g. my 23,000 word essay!)
- Empathy and being tactful
- Understanding non-literal communication
- Reading body language/facial expressions
- Remembering oral instructions (unless we write them down)
- Taking in information quickly (esp. if someone is talking and drawing simultaneously)
- Working in a noisy/chaotic environment
- Knowing “unwritten rules”
- Emotional intelligence
- Sacrificing quality for speed



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What helps us at work

- Very clear, literal communication.
- Extra time for some tasks.
- You might have to explicitly tell us social norms that “everyone knows” or unwritten social rules.



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What helps us at work

- Consideration of our sensory issues (e.g. needing quiet).
- Realistic expectations. Continuing failure to meet the expectations of others is life-destroying.



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What helps us at work

- Interacting with people requires bravery, due to a lifetime of rejection.
- Interacting with business clients (e.g. telephone calls, meetings) is even harder due to the pressure to have exceptional social skills and to maintain an “image”.



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What helps us at work

- We might need longer to develop these abilities.
- Or, you might need to adjust our jobs to involve less of these things.



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Effect of employment

- Working is exhausting due to the huge amount of mental effort required to function.
- This causes misery and lack of work-life balance. All my social interaction energy can easily be used up by working.
- Working part-time is a good option, but this is not available as of right. It ought to be.



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What I need to work

- Support inside work: I need one trusted, reliable person who I can go to for advice.
- Support outside of work: I need regular appointments with an ASD professional to check-in and discuss difficulties.



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Contact me

Debi is available for other speaking engagements on a variety of autism-related topics such as communication, sensory issues, interventions, personal experiences, and other topics and can be contacted via:

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