

## Management meetings

It is a recommendation that managers and autistic employees develop a proposed agenda for all meetings and managers provide the agenda, with advance notice of when the meeting will take place. The employee should be encouraged to add to the agenda prior to the meeting. This will help the employee to prepare for these meetings, remain focussed and on-track during the meeting and will reduce any anxiety that occurs as a result of not inferring what the meeting will be about. A summary of any action points from the meetings should be fed back to the employee in a written, bullet point, table form or list format. In order to ensure that the employee gains full benefit from their meetings and to minimise their experience of anxiety, we would recommend that the arrangements for these meetings are as follows:

- Frequency: We would recommend that the meetings are scheduled for a set time and day at regular intervals, to enable the employee to plan and prepare for the meetings.
- Format for the meetings: The meetings should follow a clear and consistent format. For example:
  1. Feedback from manager
  2. Feedback from employee
  3. Work progress and planning
  4. Reporting any upcoming changes or events
  5. Any outstanding actions (for manager)
  6. Any anxieties, worries or concerns
- Location of meetings: Meetings should take place in a quiet environment, with low background noise levels and minimal opportunities for interruptions. It may be difficult for the employee to find a suitable location and so the manager should support with provision of accommodation where needed.

## Feedback

A recommendation is that feedback is provided to the employee, and received from the employee, on a regular basis (during 1:1 meetings with line manager is ideal). This should include positive feedback and include times when things haven't gone as well as hoped or expected. When giving feedback it is important that the employee is not expected to provide a solution to what they could do differently next time. All meetings where negative feedback is given should also include positive feedback. This should also help to minimise the employees' anxiety. It is important during feedback sessions that stressors that may be producing anxiety in the employee, and resulting in unacceptable communication or behaviour, are identified and minimised or eliminated where possible and practical.

## **Managing Anxiety**

Many autistic people experience high levels in anxiety due to a number of common reasons below;

- Unexpected changes in routine, plans and tasks.
- Processing delays, particularly during verbal dialogues. It is common for autistic employees to mask/mimic understanding, or to feel pressured to respond to early and so not provide a meaningful reply.
- Unclear, indirect or vague instruction or task allocation.
- Sensory sensitivities such as noise, lighting, heat and odours.
- Consequential anxiety or “fear of failure” linked to poor confidence and low self-esteem.
- Emotional reactions from other people to their communications, such as emotive language or physical displays.
- Not knowing what is expected of them or not knowing what to do or say, particularly during social interactions.

### **Some ways to help an employee manage their anxiety are:**

1. Provide notice of any changes as early as possible in written form and explain clearly the reason for the changes.
2. Provide agenda’s and content for discussion prior to meetings and conversations, to allow additional processing time and thereby more meaningful discussion. Include a time table, detailing start and finish times for the meeting.
3. If ambiguity or uncertainty is unavoidable, provide the reason why clarity or detail can’t be provided.
4. Be mindful and flexible about locations and times for discussions and face-to-face communication, taking into account the employees sensory sensitivities. It is also worth asking the employee to rate their anxiety level immediately prior to meetings and offer a short postponement to allow the employee to manage their anxiety if the employee thinks this will be helpful. Facilitate frequent and regular, short breaks during long meetings.
5. It is important to always give positive feedback and commendations in a timely way and in writing.
6. Be clear, direct and explicit in all of your communication, avoid emotive language and provide alternative solutions and strategies to the employee wherever possible.
7. Be mindful that your employee may not wish to socialise or may be anxious about doing so and need support, such as offering to meet them prior to an event and walking into the venue with them, or letting them know when the event changes from a structured one, such as eating a meal, to an unstructured one e.g., drinks afterwards.