

ASPERGER SYNDROME AT WORK DVD REVIEW

This document is a review/summary of the recommendations in the DVD "Asperger Syndrome at Work." You can replay individual segments of the video by selecting the "Job Seeker" submenu on the DVD and choosing button for the appropriate topic.

Consider working with a job coach. Job coaches can:

1. Help you prepare to apply for a job that would suit you.
2. Help find employers who are willing to hire someone with Asperger Syndrome.
3. Help explain Asperger Syndrome to your supervisor and co-workers.
4. Help you fit into your workplace.
5. Serve as an ongoing resource to help you, your employers and coworkers work together -- and resolve any problems.

To investigate supported employment and job coaching, contact:

1. Local autism or Asperger Syndrome support groups.
2. Your state office of vocational rehabilitation.
3. School counselors.
4. Professionals who deal with Asperger Syndrome.

If you don't work with a job coach,

1. Have a parent or friend help you prepare to apply for a job.
2. Recruit supervisors or co-workers to provide support on the job.

Before you start a job search, do a personal assessment:

1. What kinds of jobs interest you?
2. What are your strengths and limitations?
3. How would those strengths and limitations affect you in the jobs that interest you?
4. What are the requirements of the jobs that interest you?
5. Can you meet those requirements, and work in the environment each job requires?

Finding a job that's related to your interests will help you succeed.

The book, "Developing Talents" by Temple Grandin and Kate Duffy can help in your assessment.

Seek input from people who know your abilities and challenges, such as teachers or guidance counselors.

When you finish your assessment and begin looking at a specific job to apply for, consider the total job and questions such as:

1. What are the hours of the job?
2. How will your work be assigned?
3. How will you know when you're finished with a task or project?

4. What do you need to do when you finish a task or project?

Make a list of any reasonable accommodations employers could make to help you be productive in your chosen job.

Employers are not allowed to discriminate against people with disabilities. Employers are required to make reasonable accommodations that enable people with disabilities to do jobs they are capable of doing.

Decide whether you're going to disclose Asperger Syndrome to your employer.

You are not required to disclose a disability to your employer, but doing so can help an employer understand how to help you succeed.

If you don't disclose, your Asperger Syndrome behaviors may be misunderstood.

The employees in the video disclosed to their employers and, when appropriate, to coworkers.

Put any requests for accommodations in a positive light. Talk about what you can accomplish with the accommodations.

Your accommodations will depend on your needs. Here are some accommodations the employees in the videos have received:

1. Getting assignments in writing, or being allowed to write notes about an assignment as it's given to you.
2. Having one person set your priorities and give you direction.
3. Getting extra training, or detailed instructions on how to do an assignment.
4. Getting a flexible schedule, perhaps with frequent breaks or a longer lunch hour.
5. Getting a shorter workday, or working a regular number of hours, but shifting them earlier or later.
6. Having a work location that's away from distractions.
7. Having a boss or colleague take notes and brief you on what happened in a staff meeting if it's too overwhelming for you to attend.
8. Being assigned to sit near, or work with, colleagues who you can deal with comfortably.
9. Having a designated place to go and calm down if you feel stressed or overwhelmed.

Another type of accommodation is having co-workers agree to use *cue words* to alert you when your behaviors interfere with work. Here are a few examples, some of which were shown in the video:

1. *"Take Five"* to suggest you take a break to calm down.
2. *"Cliff's Notes"* to suggest you need to be more brief and concise.
3. *"Not now"* if you interrupt someone when it's not a convenient time.

4. *"I have to get back to my work"* when you're spending too much time socializing.

Accommodations can also take the form of supports, such as:

1. A template you can put over a document or form that lets you see only the information you need to do your job.
2. Written instructions.
3. Schedules that tell you what to do when.
4. Checklists that let you mark a task off when it's complete.
5. Visual guides that help you identify parts or pieces of equipment, or how a task is done.

Remember that if you ask for accommodations, it's your responsibility to use them.

While accommodations can be a great help, you also need to work hard to be as flexible as possible, and try to modify behaviors that interfere with your job. Some of the adaptations our employees in the video made include:

1. Learning when not to interact with customers or patrons because it might disturb them.
2. Learning to limit your conversation and not monopolize a coworker's time to socialize.
3. Learning to deal with a bright or loud or chaotic environment.
4. Watching coworkers to learn how it's appropriate to act in a workplace.
5. Learning appropriate ways to handle stress, including recognizing when to take a break and calm down.
6. Learning to ask for help when you need it.
7. Learning you have to do a job the way your boss wants it done.
8. Learning to ask for, and accept feedback from your boss.

Before you interview for a job, prepare and practice.

1. Use job search websites or a public library to research the interview questions you're likely to hear, and come up with good answers to those questions. Use the same sources to gather information about writing a resume.
2. Have a job coach, parent or friend help you write your resume, seek out the jobs you want to apply for, and counsel you on how to submit your resume and ask for an interview.
3. Practice for an interview by having someone ask you the questions you've prepared while you give your answers.
4. If you're uncomfortable at the thought of interviewing, consider having a job coach visit with an employer first, or even attend the interview with you.
5. A job coach could also talk with an employer about job carving. That is, designing a job around your skills that would benefit the employer.
6. Research the company and learn everything you can about the job you're applying for.

7. Be ready to describe how your skills would apply to the job and benefit the company.
8. If you have limitations and wish to ask for accommodations, describe how productive you can be in a specialized job.
9. Keep your answers short. From about 15 seconds for simple questions to a minute or two for more complicated topics. But be ready to give more details if an interviewer asks for them.
10. If the interviewer asks a question you can answer with “yes” or “no,” he or she will usually expect you to offer a few sentences to explain your answer.
11. Prepare some questions you can ask about the interviewer’s company.
12. Seek guidance from a job coach, parent or friend about what to wear to the interview.

You may also want to consider interviewing for an unpaid internship, or volunteering to gain experience at a job or to become known in a workplace. This experience may help you get a paying job later.

Finally, working hard and keeping a positive attitude are key ingredients for getting and keeping a job when you have Asperger Syndrome. You want to show your employer and co-workers that you’re willing to meet them more than half-way and that your contributions will far outweigh any accommodations they provide.

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