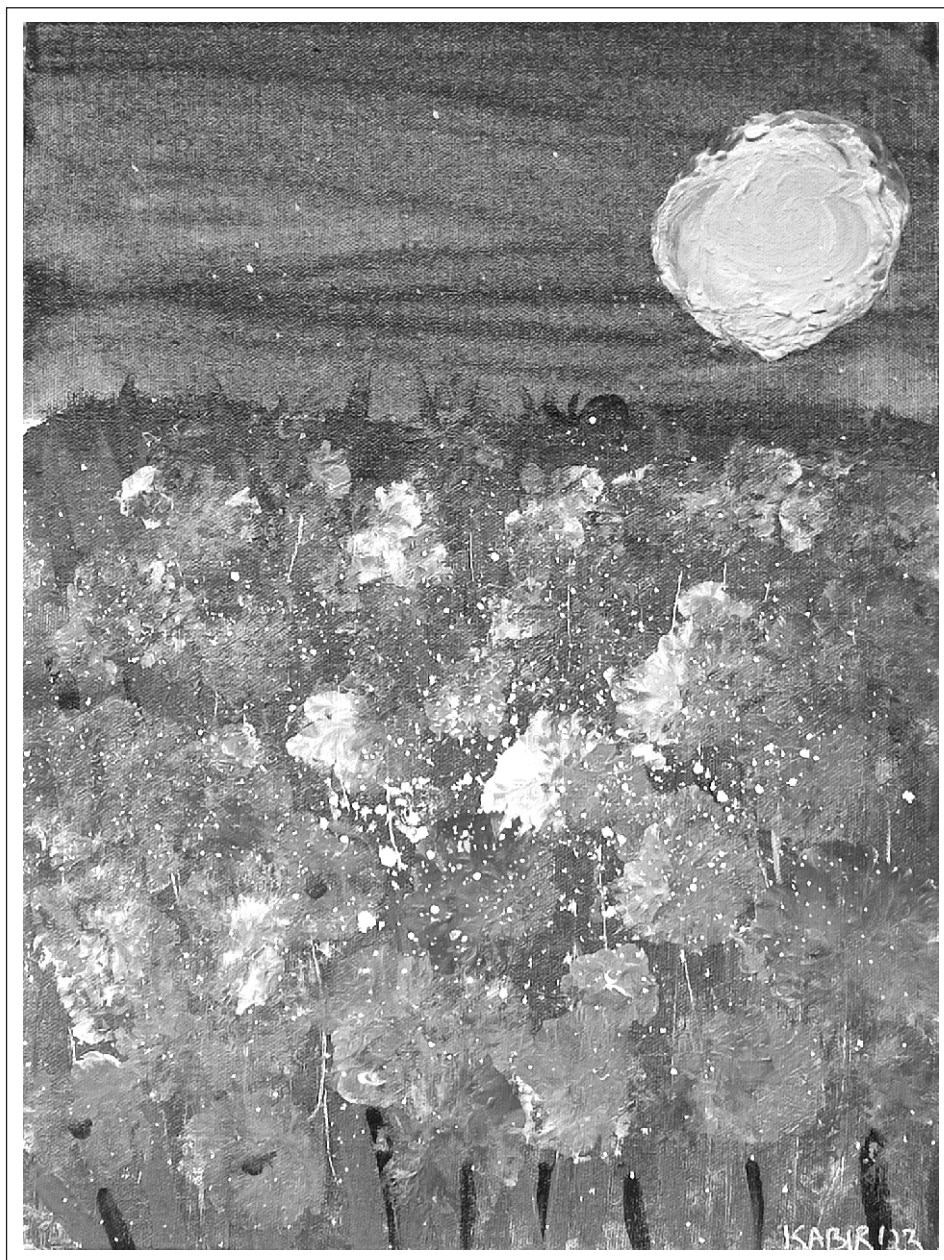


autism network

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ACTION FOR AUTISM



autism network

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Action For Autism is a registered, non-profit, national parent organization. Autism Network is published by Action For Autism to provide information on education, therapy, care and to provide interaction for families and professionals across the country.

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In referring to a child with autism, Autism Network often uses 'he', 'him' and 'his', not as a prejudice against the girl child with autism but for reasons of simplicity and because the vast majority of children with autism are male. However, many articles also use 'she', 'her' and 'hers'.

Cover Illustration 'Valley of Flowers' by Kabir Vernal

Kabir Vernal, a 13-year-old non-verbal autistic child, expresses his creativity through finger painting, process art, and brush painting. He finds joy in nature and outdoor exploration.

WISH LIST !

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PAGE ONE

In recent years, we have made significant strides in recognizing and valuing neurodiversity – the natural variation in human brain function that includes conditions such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and other cognitive differences. However, when it comes to employment, neurodivergent individuals, and in particular autistic individuals, continue to face significant challenges. These barriers are not due to a lack of ability but rather the rigid, exclusionary structures of traditional workplaces.

Unemployment and underemployment rates among autistic individuals are disproportionately high everywhere in the world. In India, considered against the population ratio, the number of identified autistic people in the workforce are next to non-existent. Studies indicate that while many autistic adults possess the skills and qualifications necessary for gainful employment, they often struggle to secure jobs that match their capabilities. The hiring process, which frequently relies on conventional interviews, can be a major obstacle. Many individuals struggle with social interactions, making eye contact when communicating, or answering abstract questions – factors that should not define their professional worth.

This exclusion has economic and social consequences. When autistic individuals are left out of the workforce, businesses miss out on a wealth of untapped talent. Moreover, the inability to secure meaningful employment contributes to mental health struggles, financial instability, and social isolation for many individuals, further reaffirming the outcome of studies that have consistently shown the correlation between disability and poverty.

Employing autistic individuals is not just an act of social responsibility; it is also a strategic advantage. Autistic people often excel in areas such as pattern recognition, problem-solving, creativity, and attention to detail. Many thrive in highly structured environments that require deep

focus, making them valuable in fields like data analysis, software development, and engineering.

Companies that embrace neurodiversity report increased productivity, improved employee morale, and greater innovation. By fostering a workplace culture that accommodates different ways of thinking, businesses become more adaptable and competitive. Many large multinational firms have neurodiversity hiring initiatives in their parent countries, but drag their feet in implementing the same in India.

Just as indigenous and multinational companies in India make structural and policy accommodations for physical disabilities, they would want to make such accommodations for autistic employees. And there is much that they could do with very little effort. Instead of traditional Q&A interviews, companies could consider skills-based assessments, job trials, or alternative interview formats. They can make a significant difference by providing simple workplace accommodations like the use of noise-cancelling headphones, flexible work hours, clear written instructions, quiet workspaces and accessible communication channels that can help autistic employees feel valued and supported. All this can happen when, companies recognize the unique skills that autistic individuals bring to the table rather than focusing on perceived limitations. Of course, workplace accommodations alone do not guarantee inclusion. Organisations must sensitize managers, supervisors and colleagues about neurodiversity and address stigma and misunderstanding to foster an inclusive and supportive work environment.

If companies truly value innovation, productivity, and inclusivity, they must prioritize meaningful employment opportunities for autistic individuals. Ultimately, the responsibility lies with businesses, policymakers, and society as a whole to ensure that autistic individuals have equal access to meaningful employment.

The Niramaya Health Insurance Scheme under the National Trust, provides affordable health coverage for individuals with disabilities, including Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Intellectual Disability, and Multiple Disabilities. This scheme covers hospitalization, OPD treatment, therapy, and assistive devices without pre-insurance medical tests.

Now, all policies of the National Trust, including the Niramaya Scheme, are easily accessible on their website. Families can enroll in or renew any policy online. If assistance is needed, organizations registered with the National Trust can guide applicants through the process.

To explore the Niramaya Scheme and other policies, visit the National Trust website (<https://nationaltrust.nic.in/>)

Promoting Employment of Autistic Individuals

Bhanu Sehrawat

1. Introduction

Today is a big day for Shubham as he prepares to take on a new role at his workplace, with excitement and nervous anticipation. After three years of hard work and dedication, he has been given the responsibility of coordinating and training a new batch of interns-a milestone he once thought was out of reach when he first started seeking employment as an autistic individual.

As the day unfolds, Shubham pours his heart into his first-ever training session, sharing his knowledge and guiding the interns with enthusiasm. By the time the session ends, he feels a deep sense of accomplishment and pride.

This is more than just a good day at work. To Shubham it feels like the start of an exciting new chapter in his career journey, one filled with growth, purpose, and new possibilities.

As encouraging as this story is, they remain few and far between. The presence of autistic individuals in the labour market continues to be minimal, characterised by high rates of unemployment and underemployment. According to the India Autism Report 2021, approximately 1 in 100 individuals in India is estimated to be on the autism spectrum. Of these, only 10-15% of autistic adults are gainfully employed, with a significant portion engaged in low-paying or part-time jobs.

A general lack of understanding of autism often leads to misconceptions and unfair stereotypes. Workplace practices, spanning recruitment to career progression, often lack accommodations for neurodivergent individuals. While lack of inclusive recruitment creates significant barriers to entry,

having no plan for career development for neurodivergent employees lead to increase in job dissatisfaction among them.

2. Autism and its Impact on Employability

Autism is increasingly recognised as a natural human variation characterised by differences in ways of thinking, communicating, sensory processing and interacting in social settings. Autism and neurodiversity at large do not require 'fixing'. Autistic individuals need understanding, acceptance and accommodations. Neurodiversity advocates, therefore, call for prioritizing autistic experiences and perspectives and address barriers that limit neurodivergent individuals from joining the workforce.

2.1. Strengths of Autistic Individuals

Autistic individuals often bring exceptional talents and strengths that can significantly enhance innovation and productivity. These include:

- **Attention to Detail:** Autistic individuals often excel in noticing details that others may overlook. This ability is invaluable in roles requiring meticulousness and accuracy.
- **Logical Processing and Instruction Adherence:** They have a knack for following instructions carefully and processing information logically, ensuring tasks are executed with precision. This also makes them great rule followers.
- **Hyperfocus and Motivation:** When deeply engaged in a task, autistic individuals can concentrate for extended periods, driven by a desire to complete their work to the best of their ability.

- **Creative Problem-Solving:** Their unique perspectives often lead to innovative solutions and unconventional approaches to challenges.
- **Reliability and Integrity:** Autistic individuals are more often than not honest, dependable, and guided by a strong sense of justice, making them trustworthy team members.

Given these attributes, autistic employees can be an asset to any organization, enhancing not only the quality of work but also fostering diversity and inclusion. This can positively reflect on an organization's brand image while offering a competitive edge in the marketplace.

2.2. The Business Case for Neurodiversity

Fostering an inclusive workforce can strengthen economies by lowering unemployment rates, improving purchasing power, reducing reliance on welfare schemes, and enhancing global competitiveness by driving innovation, improving performance, and broadening market reach. In addition, autistic employees are focussed on their work and less inclined to flit from job to job, which benefits businesses by resulting in lower attrition rates and reduced recruitment and training costs. Employing neurodivergent talent is therefore not an act of charity but rather a strategic business decision.

2.3. Challenges to Employment

Despite their strengths, autistic individuals face significant barriers to employment. These challenges stem from differences in communication, sensory sensitivities, and societal biases

2.3.1. Communication Barriers

Autistic individuals often communicate differently, characterized by directness, honesty, and a preference for clarity. They may struggle to interpret implicit cues, sarcasm, or social subtext, which are common in neurotypical interactions.

Most recruitment and workplace processes are designed around neurotypical communication styles, placing autistic individuals at a disadvantage. For instance:

- **Recruitment Processes:** Conventional interviews often emphasize traits like making eye contact, engaging in small talk, and responding to open-ended questions, which may not align with the communication styles of autistic candidates. Traditional interviews prioritize subjective qualities, such as charisma and communication style, rather than technical competence or problem-solving abilities.
- **Workplace Interactions:** Day-to-day interactions often rely on reading between the lines or interpreting unspoken expectations, which can be challenging for autistic employees.

2.3.2. Sensory Sensitivities

Many autistic individuals experience heightened sensory sensitivities, making traditional office environments challenging. Factors such as:

- Noises (e.g., typing sounds, alarms, background chatter, factory machinery noises)
- Bright or flickering lights
- Strong smells (e.g., perfumes, room fresheners, cleaning products), and
- Crowded or shared workspaces, open plan offices can lead to sensory overload, worsening their challenges, often making it difficult for autistic employees to focus and perform to their potential.

2.3.3. Educational and Structural Barriers

The journey to employment for autistic individuals often begins with unequal access to education. For autistic individuals, school education comes with

many barriers. Some of them include insufficient teacher training, inaccessible curriculum and teaching methods, sensory concerns in classrooms, limited support services, bullying and rigid admission policies. These issues lead to high rate of absenteeism and drop outs which hinder their chances to gain admissions in quality institutes of higher education. Currently most neurodivergent individuals miss out on higher education due to environments that are not inclusive or accommodating. Even those who acquire technical skills through alternative means are often excluded from job opportunities due to rigid qualification requirements or conventional recruitment practices. For instance: many employers prioritize formal degrees over demonstrated skills, thereby excluding talented autistic candidates.

2.3.4. Workplace Discrimination and Abuse

Autistic employees frequently face discrimination, ridicule, and exclusion at work due to lack of awareness and understanding among coworkers, workplace stereotypes of autistic individuals being less capable, resistance to diversity and misalignment of skills and job roles. Such negative experiences can lead to distress, absenteeism, and high turnover rates. To cope, many autistic individuals engage in 'masking' – hiding their autistic traits and mimicking neurotypical behaviours to fit in. While masking may help them navigate social expectations, it is often exhausting and detrimental to their mental health, leading to anxiety, burnout, and alienation.

3. Strategies to Promote Neurodiversity at Workplace

Creating inclusive workplaces that empower autistic individuals requires a two-fold approach, focusing on both organizational workplaces as well as autistic employees. On one hand, organizations must invest in fostering safe, understanding, and accommodating work environments. This involves training employers and neurotypical colleagues to

recognize the unique strengths autistic employees bring to the table, equipping them with the knowledge and understanding to provide reasonable accommodations that enable autistic employees to thrive and deliver their best. On the other hand, empowering autistic individuals with both technical (job related skills) and non-technical skills (like teamwork, time management, organization skills, emotional regulation, problem solving, decision making and goal setting) to secure and sustain meaningful employment.

3.1. Strategies for Employers

3.1.1. Awareness and Sensitization

Employers are often either unaware of autism or harbour harmful stereotypes which lead to barriers to entry and discriminatory work environments. Sensitization training play a key role in demystifying autism and removing stereotypes thus helping in creating inclusive workplaces for autistic individuals. It helps employers move beyond common misconceptions, provides accurate information and address unconscious biases. By encouraging employers' to see the world from an autistic perspective, sensitization training help them understand the autistic way of thinking, communicating and provide them with tools they can use to foster barrier free work environments. Such trainings are about creating a culture which values diversity, recognises autistic talent and create a judgement free zone where autistic individuals can share their concerns, thoughts and ask for accommodations.

3.1.2. Workplace Accommodations

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which India has ratified, states that workplaces will ensure that reasonable accommodation is provided to persons with disabilities and that work environments are open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities. However, there continue to remain

many barriers that hinder employment for autistic persons.

Workplace accommodations are essential for autistic employees to perform at their best and often include simple adjustments to physical work environments or business processes. Adjustments to physical environments majorly involves managing sensory sensitivities. Reducing sensory triggers by offering quiet spaces, noise cancelling headphones, flexible seating and reducing use of bright lights can prove very beneficial for autistic employees. Aiding communication and task management by providing software and assistive tools (like chatbox, Avaz, etc); or increasing productivity and managing stress by allowing for remote work and flexible work hours can significantly improve work conditions for autistic employees. Employers can adapt policy documents, Standard Operating Procedures and manuals by using direct and clear language to help the autistic individuals who have been selected for employment understand the expectations of workplace and the culture of the organization. Offering structured feedback and creating peer support groups can further help and empower employees.

3.1.3. Inclusive Policies and Processes

Creating inclusive policies and improving business processes can go a long way to promote neurodiversity at workplace. These policies can start right at the recruitment stage by using clear and straightforward language while putting down job descriptions; clearly stating essential skills and avoid using lines like 'possess great business acumen' or 'ability to communicate with ease'. Using alternates to the interview process like practical assignments and structured questionnaires can really help employers get a true sense of an autistic individual's skills. Having organisation-wide inclusive communication policy can bring a significant change. Using clear and direct communication through tools like emails, messages,

chats while providing visual aids can be a game changer. Employers must stop hiring autistic individuals just for the sake of their Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives and start creating proper career development plans and growth opportunities for autistic employees which are based on measurable outcomes rather than interpersonal relations or attributes like 'cultural fit'. Many organizations today offer wellness services like mental health support, stress management workshops and access to psychiatrists and counsellors. Making sure that the professionals who provide these services are neurodiversity affirming can go a long way in creating an effective support system for autistic employees.

3.1.4. Support from Leadership

Culture at workplaces is generally modelled after the value systems and beliefs of the leaders and top brass. Autism employment initiatives must have leadership support to succeed. Top leaders at any organization are the ones that decide on the direction of an organization. When leaders champion the rights of autistic individuals and DEI initiatives, it inspires the team and helps align all departments towards inclusivity making it an organization-wide goal. Top management plays a vital role in allocation of time and resources. Without their buy-in such initiatives can often remain underfunded or ineffective. In order to create a business advantage from inclusive hiring, it must become a sustained effort. It should not remain a one-time thing. When leaders advocate for autistic hiring and making accommodations they bring about a cultural change in the organization which promotes a more supportive environment at work removing misconceptions and barriers. s

3.2. Upskilling Autistic Individuals

When it comes to employment, many autistic individuals face challenges like inadequate skills training, lack of understanding about workplace norms, and insufficient support systems that limit

their ability to gain and maintain employment. Therefore upskilling and empowerment of autistic individuals become crucial points to take care of while working towards autistic employment.

3.2.1. Job Skill Training

To build job competency (or capability) of autistic individuals, it is important to provide technical and job role specific training to them. One must recognise the interests, strengths and challenges of an autistic person and identify potential job roles. Once the job roles are identified, the necessary competency building can be done. Any job skill training programme may include hands on training (customised to the autistic learning style), providing learning modules which use clear instructions and unambiguous language to maximise learning and facility of internships or assignments to provide real life experience. Such a programme can not only teach individuals the necessary job skills but also build the confidence of autistic individuals in their own capabilities.

3.2.2. Soft Skills and Workplace Behaviours Training

To navigate any workplace, an employee must possess basic interpersonal skills. Their success at the workplace depends on not just their technical skills but also how well they can navigate social dynamics at work with both their supervisors and coworkers. Training autistic individuals on these skills ensures that they can integrate in their work setting more effectively. Such training can focus on areas like communication (expressing thoughts, understanding social cues and listening skills), team work (working in groups, taking feedbacks, collaborating) and workplace etiquettes (punctuality, meeting deadlines, understanding organisational hierarchy and ways of working). These skills can be developed by running role playing and simulation exercises and providing visual cues and structures to support an autistic individuals.

3.2.3. Creating Personalized Support Systems

Once an autistic individual start working towards his employment, building a support system involving different stakeholders can be extremely helpful for them. A strong support system of coworkers, peers, job coaches and assistive tools and technology can help them adapt to the workplace setting and navigate the challenges they may face by developing individualised strategies.

3.2.4. Teaching Self-Advocacy

Who best to express what is required to create inclusive workplaces for autistic individuals than autistic individuals themselves. Autistic individuals can tell employers and job support teams exactly what their strengths are and what support they need to help them overcome their challenges. Teaching autistic people to advocate for their rights and needs, therefore can be a vital tool to request for accommodations (sensory friendly environment, work timings etc) and participate in creating long term systems to ensure workplace inclusion. Self-advocacy can be taught through coaching and workshops with other self-advocates which build confidence and a sense of identity among autistic adults.

4. The Future of Autism Employment

Despite the current challenges, the future of autism employment looks bright and holds promise. With growing understanding of autism among employers, many of them are working towards including more autistic individuals in their workforce and their autism hiring plans have displayed success.

Promoting the employment of autistic individuals is not just an ethical responsibility – it is a powerful step toward building a society that truly values diversity, equity, and innovation. Employment offers autistic individuals a chance to highlight their unique abilities, achieve financial independence, and lead meaningful lives. Simultaneously, businesses and economies gain from the creativity

and skills that neurodivergent individuals bring to the workplace.

The contributions of communities and NGOs are critical in this effort. Communities can spark change by encouraging local businesses to embrace inclusive hiring practices and supporting projects that celebrate neurodiversity. Meanwhile, NGOs play a vital role in bridging the gap by offering skill-building programmes, advocating for workplace accommodations, and conducting awareness campaigns to challenge misconceptions about autism. Together, these efforts form the backbone of an inclusive workforce.

But real progress requires commitment from all stakeholders. Employers must take proactive steps by creating supportive workplace policies and recognizing the strengths of autistic employees. Building a truly inclusive workplace for neurodivergent individuals requires sustained effort and commitment from the employers. Viewing DEI initiatives as ongoing long-term processes and including them as core competencies can lead to strategic business advantages and promote diversity in the organization. Policymakers can drive systemic change by enacting legislation that incentivizes inclusive employment practices. Individuals, too, have a role to play – spreading awareness, supporting advocacy, and championing inclusion within their own networks.

Ultimately, fostering employment for autistic individuals is a shared responsibility that enriches everyone. By removing barriers and creating opportunities, we unlock hidden potential, enhance workplace diversity, and pave the way for a more compassionate and inclusive society.

Bhanu Sehrawat is an HR and communications specialist with expertise in nonprofit and corporate sectors. She is a doctoral candidate with focus on neurodiversity inclusion and empowerment.

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Struggling with Employment: My Journey Through Autism, Burnout, and Rediscovery

Samriddhi Malhotra

Two years ago, at 32, I was diagnosed with autism. This diagnosis was a revelation—a key that unlocked decades of confusion and pain. Because on the one hand, I had a stellar academic record. I graduated from SRCC and went on to do my MBA from XLRI. Despite this, my first ten years in the workforce were a huge struggle. Here's what happened:

The First Job and Burnout

Straight out of b-school, I landed a job in rural development. I was excited, idealistic, and ready to change the world. But within a year, I quit. I loved the job, but at some point, I just had this overwhelming sense that I couldn't do it anymore. That I had to leave. At the time, I didn't understand why. I just felt an overwhelming need to quit. I couldn't articulate it – was it the job, the people, the environment? I had no clue. I just knew I had to get out.

Drifting Through Jobs and Starting Up

After a couple of other short-term gigs, I decided to build my own startup. For three years, I threw everything I had into it. The stress was relentless. At home, I faced physical abuse from my husband. The combination of work pressure and a toxic home environment broke me. My health deteriorated rapidly. I hit rock bottom.

Escape to Goa

In desperation, I moved to Goa, convinced the ocean would heal me. Six years later, I'm still here.

Goa became my sanctuary. I took up small freelancing jobs – content writing mostly. It wasn't challenging, but it paid the bills. More importantly, it gave me the flexibility I needed so desperately.

Being underemployed was a strange relief. It allowed me to rebuild at my own pace. I dove into yoga, meditation, and therapy. These practices were my lifelines, helping me piece myself back together.

Diagnosis and a New Path

Even after moving to Goa, and making a lot of lifestyle changes, work remained a challenge. As long as I was working 3-4 hours a day at jobs that were easy, I was fine. The moment I picked up a project that was more full-time and more intense in its demands, I would burn out quickly. So, when I was working easier jobs, I felt professionally unfulfilled. But when I had more intense gigs, I found myself overwhelmed.

It's around this time that I got my autism diagnosis.

The diagnosis explained so much – the sensory overload, the burnout, the struggles. Most importantly, I was able to rewire the story I was telling myself. I wasn't a failure, I wasn't lacking, I wasn't unworthy. I was autistic in a neurotypical world. My brain just worked differently.

With this new understanding, I started changing the way I worked. I learned how to set boundaries, to get more in touch with my needs, to recognize overwhelm, to notice when I was heading towards burnout.

I also built my work life based on this new understanding of my needs.

I trained in meditation and breathwork. I started teaching some of these tools through workshops in different cities. Today my income comes from a few different sources. From social media consulting to breathwork workshops to retreats. But the thing I'm very proud of is that I've managed to build a work life where I have complete freedom. It enables me to be flexible. To cancel engagements when I need. To take breaks when I'm overwhelmed. And that allows me to keep doing the work I love. And to make a comfortable living.

I also make it a point to keep studying and learning new things. Some skills I eventually add to my income stream. Others are just for pleasure. But this constant learning is like soul food for my neurodivergent brain – and I'm so grateful that I get to keep doing it.

Ongoing Struggles and Acceptance

To be completely honest, life is still hard. I travel a lot for work and airports are a nightmare. I still struggle with understanding when I'm getting overwhelmed. Sometimes, I take rest, but only when it's too late and my body has already reached burnout.

Plus, explaining my struggles to friends and family is tough. I'm carving this new understanding of myself slowly but surely – so I don't expect them to get it immediately. Plus, I've spent years masking my struggles. So, I can fit in. And so, vulnerability is difficult now.

It takes a lot of time and energy to explain my neurodivergent struggles and sometimes I just don't have it in me. But that's where online communities – and talking to other folks who've been diagnosed as adults – has been so empowering and beautiful.

Conclusion

Most importantly, my internal dialogue is different today. From "you are not good enough", it's shifted to "you are different". I've learned to accommodate my neurodivergence in a world that doesn't. I've learnt to make space for the difficulties. And even to celebrate the ways in which I love my 'neurospicy' brain.

And for that I will forever be grateful for my diagnosis.

Samriddhi Malhotra is a Breathwork facilitator based out of Goa. She believes in creating a safe, judgement-free space for deep inner work and lasting transformation.

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Navigating Interpersonal Communication at the Workplace

Prashasti Srivastava

Employment is viewed as a natural progression from education to career, driven by goals like financial stability and supporting loved ones. Though neurodivergent individuals are driven by the same motivations, their road to employment can be markedly different. Autistic individuals often possess exceptional strengths such as attention to detail, loyalty to routine and innovative thinking. However, along with employers to providing required accommodations, their preparation for the workplace may require intensive training in understanding and negotiating around unspoken neurotypical social norms.

One of the challenges many neurodivergent individuals share is around interpersonal communication at the workplace. Some report staying silent during feedback sessions and not knowing how to respond especially when they disagreed with something that had been said. Others report missing cues that everyone else understood and ending up feeling anxious during casual office conversations. "I didn't want to seem rude or distant, but I didn't know how to jump in."

Understanding Social Cues

Many autistic employees experience difficulty understanding body language, decoding social cues, and interpreting tone. For instance, one young man reported finding it difficult to understand when it was appropriate to speak his mind during conversations. Unable to interpret neurotypical social cues he either interrupted at the wrong time or missed his chance to contribute altogether. After working with a mentor who helped him recognize subtle cues such as eye contact or changes in tone he became more adept at understanding when to speak up.

Self-Regulating

Another challenge that autistic employees may face is self-regulation, particularly in stressful or fast-paced work environments. Managing emotions and staying composed during high-pressure situations is essential for effective communication and overall job performance. An employee working in a customer service role shared that the bustling nature of the office often made it difficult for him to stay composed. "I would get overwhelmed when things got busy, and that affected my ability to speak clearly with customers." After incorporating simple breathing exercises into his routine he found it easier to maintain focus. Many autistic employees find mindfulness exercises or breathing strategies help them remain calm and focused.

Using Words and Phrases Deemed 'Polite'

Autistic people say what they mean and mean what they say. This is contrary to the neurotypical practice which demands 'politeness' no matter how insincere. Autistic employees benefit from learning specific phrases and words to use that are acceptable to neurotypical people, or shaping their language, in situations such as asking for help, voicing a differing opinion than their manager or colleague, taking leave, discussing their progress or challenges at work, along with clarity on when and how to use these strategies. One employee shared her dread of feedback sessions, unsure of how to express her disagreement with her manager's comments without provoking him. After receiving guidance and practice such as using positive phrases (and avoiding the use of negatives), framing her opinion as a question and using a lower tone of voice, she was able her to get her point across without annoying her manager.

Visual Tools

Visual tools can play an important role in supporting autistic employees in implementing their learnings in initiating conversations with colleagues, introducing oneself in professional settings, and offering or responding to suggestions. A visual tool can be a collection of social scripts such as apt phrases or exchanges, for interjecting during discussions or asking for assistance, that an employee can refer to at relevant times. Or a 'volume meter' that acts as a visual reminder in a quiet office or during a lively team meeting for those neurodivergent individuals who forget to regulate the volume of their voices during conversations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the future of work must prioritize inclusivity. The employer and companies' role here is vital. Alongside equipping autistic employees with

the skills needed for effective interpersonal interactions, employers' commitment to inclusion is equally if not more critical. Companies that embrace diversity and foster a sensitized and inclusive culture have employees who feel understood, valued, and empowered. When companies foster an innovative and diverse workplace they enable neurodiverse employees thrive in the workplace.

Prashasti Srivastava, with a Master's degree in Clinical Psychology, is an RCI Licensed Rehabilitation Professional currently working towards supporting neurodivergent adults in preparing for employment, providing on-the-job support, and offering counselling to meet their individual needs.

The Hidden Struggles of Autistic Individuals in Neurotypical Work Environments

Devrupa Rakshit

Navigating full-time employment in India, as a neurodivergent person, has been nothing short of a nightmare. I'll turn 32 soon, and often, I think about the legal career I could *potentially* have had – if only I hadn't been autistic. I don't envy the work-life of my peers and former colleagues who have risen up the rungs of law firm ladders. What does bother me, in this capitalist society we live in, is how much money I could've been making had I continued to practice law – *maybe*, I would've been able to afford my parents international trips; *maybe*, my life would've been more comfortable; *maybe*, I'd have been able to contribute more towards household expenses so my partner – who is also neurodivergent – could take breaks. That's when I

remember: I'd probably not have been alive if I was still at a law firm.

Recalling the agony of working at law firms, I'd written (under a pseudonym) in 2019^[1], "I distinctly remember narrowly avoiding a major accident with a truck on my way back from work one (mid)night, where my brain's immediate reaction wasn't an elated – "Phew! What a save! I could've died!"; but was a decidedly dejected – "Damn it! Now, I'll have to go back to work tomorrow." That really is how bad it was.

For the longest time, though, I thought law firms were the epitome of toxic work culture. To a large

extent, that's accurate. What I've realized now, though, is that workplaces and work cultures, in general, are fundamentally designed with neurotypical people in mind – making it incredibly difficult for autistic individuals like myself to thrive, and if I'm being honest, even survive.

I graduated from law school in 2017 with a job at a tier 1 law firm in hand. As a first-generation lawyer from a middle-class family in small-town India, this was a massive achievement. But within less than a month of starting work, my excitement had turned into overwhelming stress. The need to be 'on' all day – unconsciously masking my autistic traits as I struggled to navigate office politics – took a heavy toll on my body. Then, of course, were the hallmark features of a law firm job: constant pressure, inhumanly long hours, and unreasonably high expectations. Having to jump through these hoops, day in and day out, in an office atmosphere that was never designed with autistic people like me in mind, destroyed my immunity. I was perpetually nauseated, dizzy, fogged up, on the brink of tears, and oscillating between numbness and intense emotional angst – the latter, almost always, culminated in fantasies of unliving myself.

There was no other way out – at least, none that I could see, then; I was stuck.

Six months in, I sought therapy, and was advised to quit. But quitting wasn't really an option for me – how was I to survive without an income in a city as expensive as Bombay? I didn't want to move back in with my parents in Jamshedpur either; that would come with its own set of triggers, I knew the outcome: suicidal ideation, yet again. So, when my boss called me into his cabin to have a conversation about how I've been feeling, we very quickly moved on to discussing less taxing roles at the law firm that I could take on. Evidently, the fact that I was struggling was clear to him, too. What wasn't clear to any of us – my boss, that one-time therapist, and

myself – was that it wasn't just the work pressure getting to me. In fact, it wasn't until a few years later that I realized how everything about a typical workspace – from brightly lights to busy spaces with people chattering, typing into their laptops, eating (all food smells), or simply existing around me – was contributing to my overwhelm.

Meanwhile, my auditory processing challenges as well as my inability to keep pace with neurotypical communication made social interactions – at work and otherwise – incredibly stressful and difficult for me. My challenges were invisible, but that didn't make them any less debilitating. Yet, I lacked the vocabulary to not just explain them, but also understand what was going on with me.

Things began to get a little clearer when I shifted from being a banking and finance lawyer working on stressful transactions involving crores of rupees to an undemanding, 10-to-6 legal research-based role. Still, I couldn't manage to keep up. I was still undiagnosed, and so, it never occurred to me that I was dealing with was an autistic burnout. Naturally, I never accounted for my sensory and social triggers. In fact, the therapist I was seeing told me that socializing and putting myself out there will help me deal with the depression I was going through those days. And I did exactly that until I imploded.

For months, I couldn't work. I was incurring debt, too, because I couldn't muster the courage to tell my partner – who I was living with, at this time – that I was broke. You see, I still blamed myself for everything that was going wrong in my life. In hindsight, I know it's the system that failed me. But, back then, I didn't. I just couldn't understand how people just managed to 'do' things, and I couldn't – no matter how much I tried. While neurotypical people probably feel the same way about adulting, the frequency and intensity of it all is very, very different for neurodivergent folks. Things got to a

point where I felt like I was drowning – deeper and deeper with each passing day – and trying to clutch on to absolutely anything to be able to survive. With every passing month, my mental health deteriorated; my body was covered in scars from the self-harm^[2] I'd been indulging in to manage my mental angst.

I decided to switch careers, and began applying to be a journalist. Thankfully, one of my coping mechanisms is writing – and so, through some of the darkest times I'd experienced after I began working, I'd written a short number of articles that attested to my writing skills. And, as fate would have it, just a day into starting my new job at a digital media publication, Covid19 struck and offices closed down. Like everyone else, I, too, was forced to work from home.

It was under this lockdown that I came to the realization that I could work effectively in an environment that suited my needs. Prior to this, the only times I was able to function to acceptable standards in office ever was if I found myself an empty conference room, and switched off all the lights – not just to get away from the sensory overload, but also the human beings existing around me. Until now, to be able to work, I'd waited for people to start going home so I could huddle up in my cubicle – and *actually* – focus. And because that isn't the most practical way to approach work, I was caught between turning in half-assed, shoddy, flawed, unfocused work and staying in late every night to do my work well, but then, remain exhausted for the rest of the next day.

With time, the stress added up and led to me developing Irritable Bowel Syndrome – or, at the very least, worsening it.

The pandemic allowed me to create a controlled work environment for myself – one that minimized sensory triggers, allowing me to focus and be

productive. Witnessing how work from home had become the norm^[3] in 2020 and a large part of 2021, I suddenly felt hopeful^[4]: maybe, I'll be able to thrive in my career, after all, I thought. But that's far easier said than done – especially since society hasn't become that much more accommodating. So many employers refuse to understand that for many of us, working from home isn't just about preference; it's about survival.

Yet, despite proving that I can be highly productive working from home, I do lose out on opportunities where remote work isn't permitted. Coming to terms with this hasn't been easy – more so, since it does, at times, force me to settle for jobs that'll let me work from home, regardless of how little they pay. The financial strain this brings, and the constant battle I have to fight to justify my working conditions are exhausting. In fact, employers often view accommodating my needs as doing me a favour – rather than enabling me to perform well at the work they hired me for. There's also the matter of the pervasive assumption that I'm not working hard enough simply because I'm working from home^[5]. This impression is hard to shake – no matter how hard I work and how high my output is. It's exasperating – not to mention, heartbreaking – to feel like I have to constantly prove my worth simply because I can't thrive in a traditional office setting^[6].

Workplaces must become more inclusive by understanding and accommodating the unique needs of autistic employees. Flexible work arrangements, quiet workspaces, and a culture that values neurodiversity can make a significant difference. Until then, many of us will continue to struggle, feeling misunderstood and undervalued.

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Once Upon a Time I Took a Leap of Faith: The Story of How I Built My Writing Career

Payal Dhar

Like many autistics, I hate calling up people and asking them questions. I will go to ridiculous lengths to avoid phone calls. But I am also a journalist, and speaking to strangers is part of the job. Almost every week, I find myself cajoling people to talk to me about subjects ranging from what astronauts will eat during a trip to Mars, to whether AI will help scientists read our minds.

And yes, I love my job. Being a freelance journalist gives me enough time to do the other writing that I love – making up stories.

It hasn't been easy, though. Figuring out the right balance to earn enough money from writing-related work, while not compromising my health has been a journey of more than 20 years. This includes years lost to anxiety and depression, as well as autistic burnout. It encompasses crippling self-doubt when I thought I wasn't good enough, and many instances of self-sabotage when I was scared of failing.

It wasn't until about five years ago when I realized that I was autistic, that I understood it wasn't me that was the problem.

Being a “good girl”

I decided I wanted to be a writer when I was 7 years old. That's when I wrote my first 'book' on two sheets of blank foolscap paper, and illustrated it myself. By the age of 11, I had arm-twisted my sister and cousin into running a magazine. It was called *Echo*. It came out every month, and had stories, poems, and reports; it cost Rs. 0.25 per issue (it was the 1980s).

Writing stories helped me deal with – or distract from – the Big Feelings that I couldn't understand or articulate. If I wasn't reading or writing, I was living inside my fantasies in those fictional worlds. That along with my hyperlexia – being able to read at a very advanced level, and having a good memory – made me excel at academics. So, adults decided I was a 'good girl', and children wanted to be my friend. In other words, nobody noticed my social difficulties or lack of eye contact; they never knew how special my special interests were, or that I saw patterns wherever I looked (Most people still don't realize I was never a girl, but gender-fluid).

My first real byline came many years later, but it was a very respectable one-the Hindustan Times' Sunday

supplement, for a travel piece about the Valley of Flowers trek. I received a cheque for Rs. 250 for the story and photograph. I was in college at that time, and it sealed my decision to study journalism. My special interest back then was cricket, so of course I wanted to be a sports journalist.

I got a place at the Indian Institute of Mass Communication, Delhi. Studying journalism was exciting and enthralling. Learning how the news was made and delivered fascinated me. For arguably the first time in my life, I was doing something I loved. When I ended up being the course topper, I was flabbergasted. How was this possible? I hadn't even *tried*. I had just *done*.

I guess the dye was cast, I had found my calling. But there was one obstacle, that one part of the course I had consistently scored a C+ in: reporting. The part where you had to go out and talk to strangers.

Danger! Self-sabotage ahead!

Sports journalism meant going to stadiums, training venues, hotels and even people's homes, being around crowds, and approaching people who did not know me. How was I going to do that day after day when going to the market to get a loaf of bread needed a 12-step plan?

For one whole year afterwards, I kept rejecting job offers in creative new ways. I convinced myself that as books were my first love, I should seek a career in publishing, not journalism. I got a job in a small publishing house, but that lasted only two months. Turned out, I couldn't navigate the illogical demands of workplace etiquette either.

Looking back, I can be honest and admit I was scared of going for what I really wanted. But also, it may have worked for me out in the long run. By looking at unconventional ways of getting into the world of writing, I opened up novel opportunities for myself.

It was the late 1990s, and the internet had just started to explode in India. I wrote a random email to an editor of a technology website to ask if he wanted freelance articles. He did. Because web-based

technology was a relatively new field, there were few experienced journalists in the field. It was a growing void, and I was happy to step into it. It was what we now call 'service journalism' – writing consumer-oriented pieces about practical, everyday stuff. Most of the information was available via web search, and I could do it from my desk.

The other piece of luck came from a newspaper advertisement. A well-known academic publishing house was looking for freelance editors for long-term engagement. I applied, tested, and was hired. They paid me a monthly retainer, also paid me by the page for editing work, and by the hour for other work. They covered my actuals, like auto fares, photocopying, and stuff like that. It was perfect.

The WFH trendsetter

To sound terribly immodest, I became a work-from-home professional two decades before WFH became a buzzword. When the pandemic struck, friends and acquaintances panicked about not being able to go to their offices; for me, it was a case of my normal becoming everyone else's normal too.

In the intervening years, I took on a variety of copy-editing and writing – both journalism and corporate content – work. I even had a brief fling with web design. As the internet made our world smaller, newer opportunities kept opening up for me. Of course, not having a regular job was stressful sometimes, but it was less stressful than having to go to an office and interact with neurotypicals.

This was the time I started writing fiction as well. Young adult fiction was in its infancy in India, and when my first book was published in 2006, there was hardly a market for it. Seeing your name in print on a book cover was a whole new kind of euphoria. Over the next five years, I managed to write four more novels.

It felt great. Until it didn't.

As the twenty-teens came to a close, I had to admit I was stagnating. I was bored too. I wasn't doing anything new; I wasn't challenging myself. My peers

were now senior staff in media and publishing houses, while I was still exactly where I was when I'd started. I had seven or eight novels to my name, but it wasn't enough to be considered a successful author.

Literature festivals were starting to become a thing, schools were opening up to author visits, and writing workshops were being sought after. Given my inability to 'perform', I had no public face, and authors who had started years after me had overtaken me.

I didn't know then, but I was heading for a burnout. I was diagnosed with anxiety disorder and clinical depression. I was failing to sustain myself with copy-editing work – not because there wasn't work out there, but because I couldn't concentrate. I felt like I was losing my skills.

I decided to stop copy-editing for good because it seemed like a part of my brain had died and taken my editorial skills with it.

For almost four years I hadn't written any fiction either.

A new normal

Just like queer people believe in the existence of a 'gaydar', many autistics too feel there is an 'autism sensor' that helps us zero in on other autistics. I can verify that one of my autistic friends – who lives in New Zealand and we've never met – definitely has this version of an 'autistic radar'.

They first asked me if there was a chance I could be autistic in early 2019. It set me on a quest that ended two years later in a formal diagnosis. But long before that piece of paper, I already knew the truth.

I found a website that listed ten primary signs of autism in adult women. It said, if one is experiencing 'many of these symptoms', it might suggest neurodivergence. I already knew the answer, but I wasn't expecting to score ten out of ten.

It was an epiphany – I wasn't lazy or unmotivated, I was a very normal autistic who was struggling in a world designed for non-autistics. This knowledge

spurred me on for a couple of years. I pivoted from consumer tech to hard science journalism. The stakes were higher here – more money, but more of a challenge. Plus, Zoom interviews from the comfort of your home, talking about nerdy stuff like the exact shape of an atom or whether AIs can think, are not so hard.

I also started talking openly about my mental health and autism diagnosis. Funnily enough, that broke my creative block.

Between the silver lining, however, dark clouds were collecting. I was 45 years old, and had been masking hard all my life. I had been imploding slowly. One day, I was a black hole. It was a textbook case of autistic burnout.

If I'd lost an arm or a leg, the struggle might have been obvious. Instead, I'd lost something invisible, and I didn't (still don't) have the words to describe how life-changing it was (To clarify, I'm not comparing it to losing a limb – just pointing out that there isn't a vocabulary to describe burnout). I'm not who I was a few years ago. There are things I could do then that I can no more do. That place in my brain is shut. There are days when the words on the screen make no sense to me, when all I feel is numbness. There are other days when I can go out, work, feel good. They are both normal. They are both okay.

On my worst days, though, I am thankful that 26 years ago I listened to a barely-there whisper in my head saying that what seemed to be working for everyone didn't seem right for me. I am where I am today because I made it happen. I'm working on my 13th novel right now; I broke into a dream science magazine this year.

The moral of the story is: Take that leap of faith – you know the one I'm talking about.

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Facilitating Independence for Autistic Children in Self-Care Routines

Indrani Basu

Using backward chaining can be particularly effective when teaching self-care routines. An important advantage of teaching the last step first is that the child experiences the satisfaction of completing the activity and the resultant sense of accomplishment that goes with it. Also, if a child is receiving a favoured toy or activity after the task is finished, the connection between something exciting happening immediately after having completed the learnt activity 'independently' will strengthen the desire to learn further. The crucial thing to note in this teaching procedure is that of teaching **ONE STEP at a time**. When teaching self-care routines, we often tend to teach all the steps in the chain together, and this can lead to a delay, or sometimes even failure to learn the steps to independence. When we teach one step at a time, ensuring fluency in that step before moving on to teaching the next step, we help the child experience success in incremental steps. It is seen that this success in phased bits, fuels the learning of the entire routine with greater proficiency and speed.

Needless to say, if the person is already fluent in one step, we do not 'do' that step for him, but let the step be completed independently. For instance, in the chain of washing hands, if the child is independent in wetting his hands (Step 2), once the tap has been open, the child does that step independently while following all the other teaching steps mentioned above.

This strategy of teaching one step at a time, using backward chaining is effective irrespective of whether the child is learning one single self-care routine at a time or several at the same time. The number of skills we target to teach concurrently would largely depend on the individual's learning style and existing skill sets.

IX. Prompt for success

As mentioned earlier, when teaching any skill including self-care routines, it is important to ensure that there is no possibility of any mistake when a skill is being taught

and that the learning remains errorless. This can be facilitated through the use of appropriate prompts right from the start to the end of any activity. It is important to note that a prompt is a 'temporary assistance' provided to aid and increase the likelihood of acquiring any skill. While it is important to use appropriate prompts to teach each step it is more important to gradually fade prompts as the child shows signs of independence in the steps. When this is not done it leads to the child becoming dependent on prompts to carry out any activity.

Placing our hand over the child's hand and physically prompting them through the requisite actions - often referred to as hand-over-hand prompts - is very effective when teaching independence in self-care routines. The chances of the child making an error is minimised with such prompts. Another advantage is that when providing this hand-over-hand support, it is easier to 'feel' the child's movements and this enables one to gauge the level of growing independence. This also gives the facilitator an indication of when and how much to gradually lighten the hand that is on the child's hand till the prompt is faded away completely.

Physical hand over hand prompts also help in teaching motor memory and can help circumvent difficulties in motor planning and coordination. As mentioned earlier, autistic people may have difficulties in understanding where their bodies are in space. So, when teaching the child to wipe his hair dry with a towel after bathing, the child may have difficulties in the motor planning involved in the action of raising their hands or in understanding exactly where their head is situated in relation to their body and the space he is in. When we use hand-over-hand prompts, physically moving and motoring the child through the physical parts of the self-care task, it helps create a motor memory for that skill, and helps to execute the action (that of raising hands). It would also help to develop a better sense of one's body in space.

For the child who is able to imitate actions, we may also use imitative prompts ie model the actions in the routine and encourage him to imitate the same.

When the goal is independence it is a good idea to keep verbal instructions, reminders and prompts to the minimum as dependency on such verbal inputs can be the hardest to wean off. These verbal prompts can become part of the routine itself and prevent the child from completing activities until the verbal prompt is given, hampering their independence. Physically guiding the person through the routine along with providing visual supports are a great way to replace such verbal prompts.

It is worthwhile to keep in mind, that when we use backward chaining to teach, by the time we start teaching the earlier steps of a routine, we may be able to fade prompts much quicker. This is because the person has been going through these steps every time we practice the entire routine. And even though, the earlier steps weren't the target steps, it is possible that some of those steps, have already been learnt through this repetition. In that case, do fade prompts for any steps that the person seems to be independent in. The rule of thumb with any teaching is to only offer prompts where the child needs it.

X. Work on imitation skills

Imitation is a vital skill to keep teaching from the early years. The child who has good imitation skills can learn many self-help skills by just observing and imitating those in his environment without any intensive, planned teaching on our part. If the person can imitate actions well, we could teach some of the steps of a self-care routine through imitation. This is particularly appropriate whilst teaching adolescents and adults where hand over hand prompts may not be very appropriate and may amount to an invasion of their privacy and space.

XI. Teach required component skills in a table top environment

Some skills can be taught in a 'table top' instructional environment. For example, if we are teaching the to button his shirt, we may use 'buttoning boards' to teach the skill of buttoning separately. If the child does not regulate the pressure to be applied when peeling a boiled

potato, pressing microwave buttons or computer keys, he can have fun table top activities with pegs of different strengths, eg small wooden pegs for paper, and clothes pegs (pins) of varying stiffness.

XII. Use visual supports

Visual supports are one of the most valuable tools to foster success and independence in autistic people. They can help act as visual reminders to initiate an activity, go through steps of an activity, transition from one activity to another, remember the 'rules' around an activity, taking away the need for verbal instructions or reminders, leading to a far more independent way of functioning. One can use **daily visual schedules** which is a 'time table' that shows with the use of visual cues the sequence of what will happen, when and where in the day. The visual schedule can be for the full day or parts of the day. The visual provides clarity and most importantly predictability so that the child knows in advance when any activity, including self-care routines are to happen.



Fig 1.4 is Rahul's daily morning schedule (part day) that clearly indicates all the activities including self-care routines that are to be performed from the time he wakes up till just after his 'study time'. The 'visual' schedule helps the child immensely in anticipating transitions and initiate activities without verbal reminders. Visual schedules must be at each person's level of understanding. The visual cues can be objects, pictures – photographs or line drawings, or textual or a combination, depending on the individual's level of comprehension.

An 'activity worksystem' or a 'to do list' presents the sequence of the steps required to finish a routine in a visual manner. It is akin to a recipe that we follow whilst making a new dish. Like the visual schedule, the 'to do list', too, must be individualised to

Fig: 1.4: Daily individualised schedule

the child's level of understanding. The 'to do list' is placed in the area where the targeted self-care routine takes place. For example, the 'to do list' for washing hands, bathing, brushing teeth is placed in the bathroom, but a 'to do list' for packing the school lunch box will be in the kitchen.

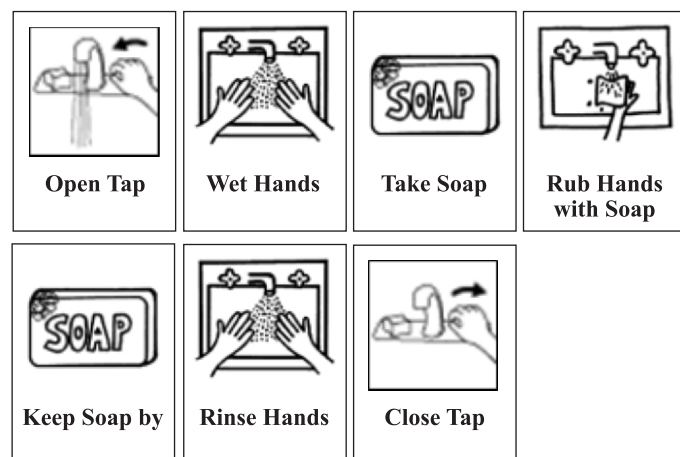


Fig 1.5: 'To-do list' for washing hands pasted near the wash basin

Another support that can be used to augment learning a self-care routine is a 'social story'. A social story is usually a first-person, present-tense story used to provide information about the varied situations and settings that the child experiences. A social story is a patient, gentle way to improve understanding so that the child is better prepared to navigate and respond more effectively in situations, including self-care routines. The length of the story, the complexity of the language used, whether illustrations are used or not will all be driven by the requirements of the individual child.

Example of a social story to teach a self-care routine:

Brushing my Teeth

I brush my teeth everyday so they are clean.
 I put the toothbrush in my mouth.
 First I brush in the back on the bottom.
 Next I brush in the back on the top.
 Then I brush in the front on the bottom.
 Last I brush in the front on the top.
 When I am done brushing my teeth I can spit out the toothpaste.
 I can rinse off my tooth brush after I spit.
 When I am all done I can play on the swing.

XIII. Incorporate in routines

Autistic people are natural routine followers. They function better when there is a system in place for the activities they need to do on a regular basis. In addition to visual supports, having a routine around self-care activities can help autistic people remember and initiate these without being dependent on people's reminders. Such routines might include washing hair on specific days of the week, brushing teeth at the same time every day, changing clothes at certain times in a consistent daily routine, and routines around a fixed bedtime .

XIV. Praise! Reinforce! Celebrate!

It is absolutely essential that we remember to praise every effort that the person makes. What may seem trivial and commonplace to a lot of non-autistic people can often be the result of immense effort and grit by autistic people. So, let us ensure that we acknowledge this effort and celebrate each step that the child takes.

In conclusion, it is important to remember that all of us have different learning trajectories, including autistic people. Tailoring the process to individual needs is crucial to success, as is consistency and patience. And of course, keeping learning fun is the global mantra for successful learning outcomes across all skill areas, including self-care routines.

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व्यवसायिक कौशल और उनके महत्व

दीपा रावत

जैसे के हम सभी जानते हैं की व्यवसायिक कौशल एक व्यावहारिक कौशल और तकनीकी कौशल हैं जो किसी भी व्यक्ति को एक व्यवसाय में निपुण बनाता है। व्यवसायिक कौशल सभी के जीवन में बहुत महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभाते हैं और यह सभी के लिए आवश्यक भी हैं। जो ऑटिस्टिक व्यक्ति को आत्मनिर्भर और रोज़गार योग्य बनाने में मदद करते हैं। ये व्यवसायिक कौशल क्या हैं आइये न रओ जाने:

व्यवसायिक कौशल को दो भागों में विभाजित करते हैं:

i. तकनीकी कुशलता (हार्ड स्किल्स)

ii. व्यावहारिक कुशलता (सॉफ्ट स्किल्स) रोओ

तकनीकी कुशलता

इस कौशल में वह सभी कौशल आते हैं जो हमारे मोटर स्किल्स और कॉग्निटिव स्किल्स से सम्बंधित होते हैं। जैसे की डाटा एंट्री, कंप्यूटर से सम्बंधित कार्य, सुई धागा या किसी मशीन का प्रयोग, ग्राफ़िक डिजाइनिंग, बर्दईगिरी में दक्षता हासिल करना, CAD सॉफ्टवेयर और फोटोशॉप में विशेषग्यता हासिल करना जैसे कुछ उदाहरण हैं। यह कौशल को सीखना और अभ्यास से निपुणता हासिल करना ऑटिस्टिक व्यक्ति के लिए आसान होता है।

व्यावहारिक कुशलता (सॉफ्ट स्किल्स)

यह कौशल प्रभावी संचार, नेतृत्व, सुनने की क्षमता, रचनात्मकता, सामाजिक कौशल, सहभागिकता और समस्या समाधान जैसे गुणों को शामिल करते हैं। सॉफ्ट स्किल्स का होना करियर में आगे बढ़ने के लिए बहुत आवश्यक हैं।

इसके कुछ उदाहरण निम्नलिखित हैं:

- संचार सम्बन्धी व्यवहार
- समय प्रबंधन
- मनी मैनेजमेंट
- सेल्फ रेगुलेशन
- क्रिटिकल थिंकिंग
- प्राइवैसी एंड सेक्सुअलिटी
- इंटरपर्सनल बेहेवियर

वर्कप्लेस में सॉफ्ट स्किल्स उतनी ही महत्वपूर्ण हैं जितना के तकनीकी कौशल। पहला व्यक्ति के व्यवहार और व्यक्तित्व को दर्शाता है। सॉफ्ट

स्किल्स में आपका व्यक्तित्व, संचार कौशल, लोगों के साथ बातचीत करने का तरीका और रवैया शामिल होता है। हम सभी जानते हैं की एक ऑटिस्टिक व्यक्ति के लिए तकनीकी कौशल सीखना जितना आसान है उससे कहीं ज़्यादा व्यवहारिक कौशल को समझने में मुश्किल होता है क्योंकि ऑटिस्टिक व्यक्ति अपने आस-पास के वातावरण को अलग तरह से महसूस करता और समझता है और अलग तरह से व्यक्त करता है। वर्कप्लेस में सॉफ्ट स्किल्स उतनी ही महत्वपूर्ण हैं जितना के तकनीकी कौशल। पहला व्यक्ति के व्यवहार और व्यक्तित्व को दर्शाता है। सॉफ्ट स्किल्स में आपका व्यक्तित्व, संचार कौशल, लोगों के साथ बातचीत करने का तरीका और रवैया शामिल होता है। जिससे एक ऑटिस्टिक व्यक्ति के द्वारा किये गए व्यवहार दूसरों को समझ कभी कभी अलग या अटपटे लगते हैं। चलिए कुछ उदाहरण से इन व्यवहारों को समझने की कोशिश करते हैं।

१ संचार सम्बन्धी व्यवहार

जैसे हम अपने विचार या कठनाईयों को अपने सहकर्मियों के समक्ष व्यक्त करते हैं परन्तु ऑटिस्टिक व्यक्ति को अपनी बात को वर्बल और नॉन-वर्बल तरीके से व्यक्त करने में कठनाई होती है। वे दूसरों की बातों को समझ जाते हैं और कुछ लोग अपनी बातों को कप व्यक्त भी कर पाते हैं पर उस तरीके से नहीं व्यक्त कर पाते जिससे दूसरा व्यक्ति उससे समझ सके। उनके नज़रिये से वो अपने आप को सबके समक्ष अच्छे से दिखने/ रहने की क्षमता रखते हैं परन्तु नॉन-ऑटिस्टिक व्यक्ति के लिए उनकी बातें समझना कई बार मुश्किल हो जाता है। वो किस प्रकार अपनी बात व्यक्त करे की दूसरे व्यक्ति को समझ आ जाए।

२ समय प्रबंधन

आपके तथा हमारे लिए रोज़मर्रा के अन्य किसी भी कार्य को करना आसान होता है। उसकी प्लानिंग करना भी कोई बड़ी बात नहीं होती है क्योंकि हमारा ब्रेन बहुत सी बातों को एक साथ समझ कर प्लानिंग कर पाता है। प्रिऑरिटीज़ करना अथवा किसी भी कार्य को सुव्यवस्थित करना आसान हो पता है परन्तु ऑटिस्टिक व्यक्ति एक बारी में एक ही कार्य पर फोकस कर पाते हैं और सुचारु रूप से प्लानिंग करने में मुश्किल महसूस करते हैं। इसीलिए वो एक जैसी दिनचर्या ये रेपेटिटिव टास्क ज़्यादा पसंद करते हैं। ऑटिस्टिक व्यक्ति को कभी कभी पंचुअलिटी, फ्लेक्सिबिलिटी, सिक्केसिंग ऑफ़ टास्कस, फिनिशिंग

टास्कस इन टाइम, जैसी जगह पर मुश्किलें आती हैं और यह सभी स्किल्स एक कार्यस्थल के लिए अनिवार्य होते हैं।

३ सेल्फ रेगुलेशन और प्रॉब्लम सॉल्विंग

इस कौशल में वो सभी कौशल शामिल हैं जो किसी भी परिस्थिति को समझ कर अपने व्यवहार में बदलाव लाना है। अधिकतर सभी लोगों को इसमें मुश्किल आती है।

सेल्फ रेगुलेशन के लिए बहुत से स्किल्स अनिवार्य हैं जैसे किसी भी टास्क को समझना, फिर उसको पूर्ण करने के लिए परियोजना बनाना, अगर योजना की हिसाब से कार्य नहीं होता है तोह उसका मूल्यांकन करना, फिर से प्लान करना और उसको परिस्थिति के हिसाब से बदलाव लाकर पूर्ण करना। यह सभी स्किल्स एक ऑटिस्टिक व्यक्ति के लिए ओवरवेलिंग हो सकते हैं। इसके साथ साथ अपनी भावनाओं पर नियंत्रण करना भी मुश्किल हो जाता है। जैसे ऑटिस्टिक व्यक्ति को यह पता होता है की जंक फूड सेहत के लिए अच्छा नहीं है और उसे वो नहीं खाना चाहिए परन्तु जैसे ही सामने जंक फूड आता है उसको मना नहीं कर पाते हैं। कभी कभी वातावरण को ना समझ पाने से और अपने अंदर के बदलाव को अच्छे से महसूस ना कर पाने की वजह से भी भावनाओं को रेगुलेट करना मुश्किल हो जाता है।

४ मनी मैनेजमेंट

इस कौशल में शायद हम सभी को कठिनाई होती है क्योंकि बजट की परियोजना और उस पर अटल रहना बहुत मुश्किल होता है। यह भी सेल्फ रेगुलेशन का ही हिस्सा है। इसमें अपनी इच्छाओं और ज़रूरतों की चीज़ों में संतुलन, प्रिऑरिटीज़ करना ज़रूरी होता है जिसमें ऑटिस्टिक व्यक्ति को मुश्किल हो सकती है। बचपन से ही उन्होंने अपनी चाहतों को ही ज़्यादा समझा है और पाना चाहा है, तो ज़रूरतों पर ज़्यादा ध्यान ही नहीं जाता। अभिभावक भी अधिकतर बच्चों की पैसे सम्बंधित कुछ ही कार्यों पर ध्यान देते हैं जैसे पैसे की पहचान, जमा-गुना और आदान-प्रदान। इसी वजह से काफी ऑटिस्टिक लोग प्रबंधन का अर्थ नहीं समझ पाते।

५ सेल्फ केयर

इसमें वो सभी कौशल शामिल हैं जो अपनी शारारिक और मानसिक देख रेख के लिए ज़रूरी हैं। सेल्फ केयर करने के लिए हमें अपनी और अपने शरीर की जानकारी होना ज़रूरी है। सेल्फ केयर में सबसे पहले हम अपने शरीर की साफ़-सफाई को देखते हैं जैसे बालों को अच्छे से बनाना, नाखून काटना, अपने निजी अंगों की सफाई, किसी भी इवेंट के हिसाब से कपड़ों का चयन करना, सभी सम्मिलित हैं। ऐसा नहीं की ऑटिस्टिक व्यक्ति यह नहीं करना चाहते परन्तु कुछ चीज़ों के प्रति

अधिक या काम संवेदनशील होने की वजह से भी इन सभी में परेशानी हो सकती है। इसके साथ साथ परियोजना बनाना और उसको पूर्ण करने में भी मुश्किल हो सकती है। इन्हीं कारणों से वो अपनी मानसिक देख रेख में भी विलम्बित हो सकते हैं।

६ इंटरपर्सनल व्यवहार

इनमें वह सभी व्यवहार आते हैं जो हम एक दूसरे के साथ बातचीत करते समय या इंटरैक्शन करते समय करते हैं। अब इसे करने के लिए भी हमें अपनी भावनाओं, परिस्थिति और दूसरे की भावनाओं को समझना ज़रूरी होता है। हमारे समाज में एक जगह से दूसरी जगह जाने पर ही सामाजिक नियम बदल जाते हैं। जैसे बर्थडे पर गिफ्ट मिलता है यह समझ आता है परन्तु किसी रिश्तेदार से मिलने गए और वहां पर वापसी में गिफ्ट मिलता है यह एक ऑटिस्टिक व्यक्ति के लिए कंप्यूशन पैदा कर सकता है।

दूसरा रिश्तों को समझ कर अपने व्यवहार में बदलाव लाना यह भी ऑटिस्टिक व्यक्ति को समझने में मुश्किल होती है। किसी से कितनी दूरी रख कर बात करनी चाहिए, अपना दायरा कितना है ये सभी बातों को समझ कर हम एक दूसरे के साथ बात करते हैं पर एक ऑटिस्टिक व्यक्ति के लिए यह सब बहुत कंप्यूसिंग होता है, जिसके कारण अपने कार्यस्थल पर वह उन बातों को भी बोल देते हैं जो उन्होंने कहीं फिल्मों में सुनी हैं बिना उसका मतलब जाने और ऐसा सब सुनकर उन पर पॉश जैसे एक्ट के अंदर कंप्लेंट हो जाती है।

उपरोक्त लिखित कुछ ऐसे उदाहरण हैं जो किसी भी कार्यस्थल पर ज़रूरी हैं। इसके अलावा भी और व्यवहारों को दर्शाना ज़रूरी होता है। जैसे किसी स्थान पर जाने के लिए पब्लिक यातायात के साधनों का प्रयोग, इमरजेंसी में क्या करना चाहिए, किसी बदलाव में कैसे अपने को संभालें, समय का सही प्रयोग इत्यादि और उपरोक्त लिखे सभी स्किल्स को बहुत अच्छे से एक ऑटिस्टिक व्यक्ति को सिखाना या समझाया जा सकता है अगर हम उन्हें नॉन-ऑटिस्टिक वातावरण को उनके नज़रिये से समझते हुए और उनकी आवश्यकताओं और क्षमताओं को ध्यान रख कर उनके लिए सपोर्ट सिस्टम बनाएं। हम अपने अगले क्रम के उल्लेख में सपोर्ट सिस्टम क्या होते हैं और उनको कैसे इंटीग्रेट किया जा सकता है यह समझेंगे।

दीपा रावत ऐफ़े में स्पेशल शिक्षक है। वह कई सालों से ऑटिस्टिक एडल्ट्स के साथ काम कर रही हैं।

AFA MEMBERSHIP FORM

Action For Autism(AFA) is a parent organization that strives to create an environment where individuals with autism and their families can live as fully participating members of the community.

To support AFA to further its mission, please complete the form below and return to: Action For Autism, The National Centre for Autism, Sector 7 & 8, Jasola Vihar, New Delhi - 110025.

Please complete in BLOCK letters and mail to Action For Autism

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____

Country _____ Pin/Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

I am a: *(Check all that apply)*

☐ Mother ☐ Father ☐ Other (please specify) _____

☐ Professional: Name of Organisation _____

For Parent of a person with autism ONLY:

Child's Name _____

Gender: ☐ Female ☐ Male Date of Birth _____
dd mm yr

Diagnosis _____

Diagnosis received from _____

I wish to become a member of AFA. Enclosed is a contribution
(Check as applicable)

Via: ☐ Cash ☐ Online ☐ Demand Draft
(in favour of Action for Autism, payable at New Delhi)

Online Transaction/Draft No _____ Dated _____

Drawn on _____

Amount in Words _____

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Parent: INR 1000 (USD 43) Professionals: INR 2000 (USD 55)

Institutional: INR 5000 (USD 100)

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Domestic Transactions

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Account No: 76620100007129

Bank of Baroda, Defence Colony, New Delhi 110048, India

IFSC No: BARB0VJDEFE (5th digit is Zero)

Overseas Transactions

Beneficiary Name: Action For Autism

Account No: 40029268651

State Bank of India, 11 Sansad Marg, New Delhi 110001, India

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