



Unit 5: GUIDELINES FOR FUTURE TRAINERS AND HR STAFF

Informing employers and HR

In addition to the general information on the nature of autism set out in the previous chapters, employers and HR should also have information on the characteristics of each individual employee with autism. We must not deceive employers in terms of the abilities and work skills of people with autism, but it should also be borne in mind that existing models of employment support for people with autism are mainly aimed at "correcting" their shortcomings, resulting in low expectations of employers and poor outcomes. employment. Therefore, it is very important to establish the individual capacities of a potential employee with autism and, in accordance with their strengths, to adapt the workplace and the work process itself.

The issue of disclosing the diagnosis to employers and colleagues at work is very sensitive. Some people with autism are reluctant to communicate their diagnosis for fear of discrimination, thus reducing the chances of the work environment adapting to their needs (Lindsay et al., 2021). However, a formal diagnosis of autism is not necessary to provide additional support. It may happen that the worker is not aware of his diagnosis because: he does not have the cognitive capacity to understand the nature and name of the disorder; family members did not want to tell him the diagnosis or he was never diagnosed. In the latter case, possible difficulties in the workplace can be a trigger for the manifestation of socially inappropriate behavior and reporting to diagnostics. Diagnosis is a very delicate procedure and it would be good to undergo the process with the help of autism experts, while respecting employees' rights and ethical standards.

Work instructors and employers must be aware of co-occurring conditions that may affect the safety of workers with autism, such as epilepsy, anxiety disorder, depression, hearing impairment, etc.



Sensitivity to discrimination

It is well known that people can be discriminated against on the basis of their sexual orientation, religious beliefs, skin color, etc. Likewise, there are beliefs and practices that discriminate against individuals on the basis of their disability, which are termed ableism. Offensive actions towards employees with autism will be recognized by almost everyone, but there are also some forms of behavior that subtly discriminate against people with autism, regardless of whether there is a conscious intention of employees to do so. Rules of procedure are created by neurotypical persons and they, as a rule, take the behavior of the majority as a socially acceptable norm. It can happen that team-building activities, prescribed uniform, use of ambient music, specific rules of addressing superiors or users of a company's services, represent an insurmountable barrier for people with autism. Due to misconceptions about the nature of autistic disorder, some employees use patronizing and deficit-based language, and sometimes avoid direct contact with an autistic person and turn to their work instructor. For people with autism, creating a workplace culture can be of great help, in which the work and achievements of each employee will be appreciated, as well as his specific needs for support.

Schedules

People with autism have difficulty following verbal instructions and often cannot plan the sequence of activities. That is why they need to have schedules in which the phases of work will be explicitly shown. In its simplest form, schedules can take the form of a checklist, with the worker having to check each completed activity. Since most people with autism rely on visual processing of information, schedules can be used in which the phases of work activity are shown in pictures, photographs, pictograms or small three-dimensional objects, depending on the previous habits and abilities of the employee. Personal digital assistants can be used for the same purpose. Visual schedules show not only the individual stages of the work operation, but also the structure of the working day. Therefore, it would be very useful to have special daily schedules in which the individual stages of the working day will be shown: coming to work, greeting other workers, preparing the workplace,



realization of work activities, breaks, etc. Schedules can also be used to gradually accustom employees with autism to change.

Setting rules

Rules of conduct in the workplace should be explicitly stated, either verbally or using additional visual support. Instructors and employers should not think that some activities are self-evident (eg that a worker can drink coffee during a break). The rules should be set out in a way that a person with autism can understand. Irony, sarcasm, idioms, as well as words of unclear or ambiguous meaning should not be used. The rules should regulate hard skills (what needs to be done to complete the job), soft skills (social skills in relations with clients and colleagues), maintaining a safe environment, sudden situations, rights in the field of labor law ...

Training programs

Instructors should use evidence-based practices in the process of training people with autism. There are specially structured intervention programs in the field of employment, of varying degrees of scientific basis. Most of these programs use modeling, chaining, encouragement, and reinforcement techniques (Hendley et al., 2017; Le et al., 2021). Modeling is based on the fact that people learn best by observing other people's behavior and the consequences that such behavior has. If a work instructor or colleague shows a person with autism how to perform a work activity, it is live modeling. For many people with autism, video modeling is also tempting, ie. showing the work activity or its segment via videos. It is important that each complex activity be divided into very small steps that are easy enough for a person with autism. The basis of the chaining technique is the division of complex activities into segments, and then the gradual learning of one segment of activity at a time, with appropriate encouragement and support. We encourage an employee with autism if he does not know how to perform an activity, if he does not react to an order or if it is obvious that he will react incorrectly. In the beginning, the stimuli may be physical, when we put our hand over the hand of a person with autism and thus perform a certain activity. The work instructor should try to replace the complete physical stimulus with a partial stimulus as soon as possible (gently directing the hand of a person with autism in the



desired direction). It then moves on to showing the activity to be performed with the index finger (gestural stimulation), to then move on to less intrusive types of stimulation, such as verbal. Just as incentives will become less frequent over time, so will the support of workers for successfully performed activities be less and less.

Monitoring and supervision

Work instructor support is not limited to teaching work operations, but also includes monitoring the entire work process and its effects. Individuals with autism, even when they master a certain activity, can be insecure and constantly seek support and reassurance that everything is fine. The work instructor should provide encouragement and support to the worker with autism whenever necessary, trying to reduce the reinforcement and support over time and to make the person with autism as independent as possible. The supervisor should clearly state which behaviors are good and which need to be changed. If a worker has a problem performing an operation, it should be divided into smaller, simpler operations or additional training should be conducted. During supervision, constantly refer the worker with autism to the final product of work and, if possible, the global goal of the company in which he is employed. Depending on the nature of the job, part of the monitoring and supervision activities can be taken over by other employees. In that case, it is important to ensure that other colleagues, in the best of intentions, do not take on the job of employee with autism. For successful realization of work and improvement of quality of life of a person with autism, it is necessary to create a support network which, in addition to employees, will consist of experts of various profiles who know a specific person with autism, as well as members of his family.

Augmentative and alternative communication

There is a prejudice that by using the means of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC), people with autism will forever distance themselves from people from the typical population. There is also a belief that these resources are used only with children and that they should be discarded over time. However, if a person with autism uses AAC in their daily life, they should be able to do so and think about how they can be used in the work environment. In addition to AAC, modern digital technologies can be used for training in performing work activities. Electronic forms of communication such as online



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communicators, e-mail, discussion chats, chatbots, etc. do not require direct eye contact and understanding of body language, which is why they are especially recommended for people with autism.



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