



AUTISM AND THE WORKFORCE:  
BALANCING EMPLOYMENT, DAILY LIFE, AND WELL-BEING

---

BY: MARIA O. MENDEZ PH.D., NCSP., NCC  
ALLISON M. SALAZAR, B.A.



# Dimensions of Wellbeing a Holistic Framework

---



# Objectives

---

- Understand ASD-related workplace challenges for Adults
- Learn how executive functioning affects daily life
- Explore practical strategies that reduce job stress
- Identify free/local job resources

# ASD Transitions (Adolescent to Adult)

---

## **School-Based Transition Services:**

The goal of school-based transition services is to support and prepare students for a successful move from school to post-school life. These services help facilitate the transition to a range of adult outcomes, including:

- Postsecondary education
- Vocational training
- Integrated or supported employment
- Continuing and adult education
- Access to adult service agencies
- Independent living
- Meaningful community participation

# ASD Employment Statistics

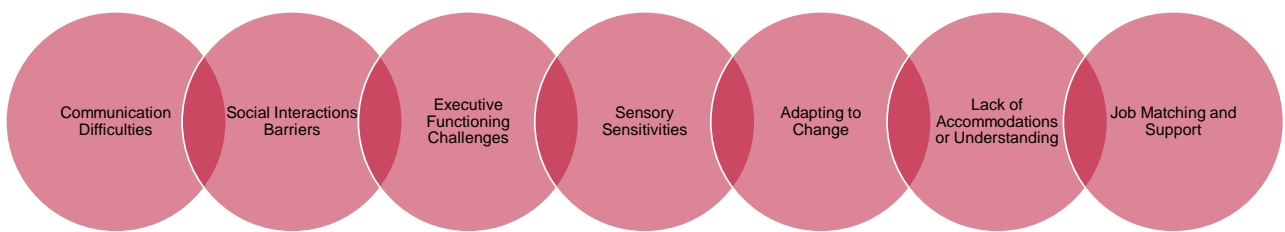
---

- **Unemployment Rate:** Estimates range from 50% to 90% compared to 4.2% (U.S. BLS)
  - A 2017 PubMed Study (=254) found 61% employed, but 38% were unemployed. Over half reported job mismatch, and most lacked employment support.
  - Disclosure matters: Those who disclosed their ASD were 3x more likely to be employed.
  - High Education correlated with an increased employment rates.
- **College Graduates:** 85% of Autistic Individuals with a college degree are unemployed or underemployed.
- 50% of 25-year-olds with Autism have never held a paying job, despite having the skill sets and expertise to excel in the workplace (Forbes, 2021)



# Workplace Challenges

---





### Workplace/Employers

- Autism Hiring Initiatives / Inclusive Hiring process
- Workplace accommodations
- Mentorship / Job Coaching
- Provide Education to reduce bias
- Provide clear directions and expectations



### Co-workers & Community

- Aim to be inclusive & supportive
- Avoid judgement regarding communication differences
- Peer-mentoring
- Engage in awareness training
- Advocate



### Self

- Engage in supportive resources (support networks)
- Communicate needs when possible
- Seek employment that aligns with strengths and interest
- Practice self-advocacy
- Self-employment trends

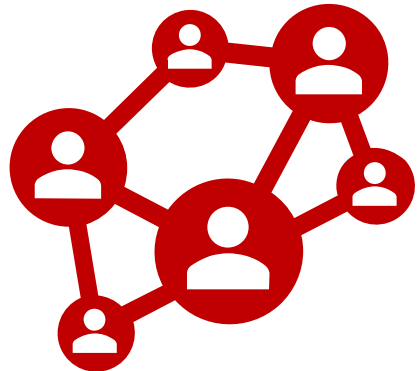
## Shared Responsibility



# Navigating Relationships

---

- Differentiating Relationship Types
- Communication Skills
- Building and Maintaining Friendships
- Recognizing and Setting Boundaries
- Conflict Resolution and Emotional Regulation
- Creating Supportive Networks



# Executive Functioning and ASD



- What is Executive Functioning/Dysfunction?
  - "Executive function skills help us plan, focus attention, switch gears, and juggle tasks."
    - (Harvard: <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resource-guides/guide-executive-function/>)
  - When these skills are underdeveloped/harder to access it results in executive dysfunction
- What executive dysfunction difficulties are in individuals with ASD:
  - Planning and Organization
  - Impulse Control
  - Emotional Regulation
  - Working Memory
  - Cognitive Flexibility
  - Focusing

- 11

# Strategies for Workplace Challenges

- **Structured Routines & Visual Schedules**
  - Using calendars, task lists, and reminders (physical or digital) to stay on track.
- **Task Breakdown**
  - Breaking work tasks into small, manageable steps to improve task completion
- **Timers/Alerts & Mobile Technology**
  - Using phone alarms or apps to signal when to start or stop a task.
  - Use apps to incentivize daily tasks (Habitica)
- **Workplace Accommodations & Vocational Support**
  - Disclosure Decisions ([https://worksupport.com/documents/disclosure\\_decisions1.pdf](https://worksupport.com/documents/disclosure_decisions1.pdf))
  - Requesting accommodations such as written instructions, flexible schedules, or task modifications.
  - Practicing workplace interactions through role-play or coaching to improve professional communication.
- **Self-Care Strategies**
  - Scheduling reminders for meals, hydration, movement breaks, and sleep hygiene.



# Technology and Success

Using the technology which one has cuts down on cost. Utilize phones, tablets and computer with apps that are typically available through the Apple Store and Google Play.

- Executive Function Apps

- Trello
- Evernote
- Google Calendar

- Focus Apps

- Rescue Time Lite
- Focus Keeper

- Lifestyle Apps

- Sleep Cycle



# Other Employment Resources

---



- Other Resources for employment supports:
  - Paying privately or utilizing waiver services for employment coaching
- Ticket to Work Program
  - This federal program connects Social Security beneficiaries with disabilities to free employment services, such as career counseling and job placement, aiming to promote financial independence.
- Taking a College of Employment Services course through UNM CDD
  - Certification programs offered through Partners for Employment (PFE) program
- Utilizing school to work transition programs for young adults
  - Project SEARCH
  - School-to-Work Transition Teams
  - Any PSE (College, Vocational Rehab, apprenticeships)

# Advocacy and Legal Support

---

- Disability Rights New Mexico
  - This organization offers advocacy and assistance to ensure individuals with disabilities can access necessary services and resources, including employment support.
  - <https://drnm.org/>
- Americans with Disability Act (ADA)
  - Know your Employment Rights as an Individual with a Disability
  - <https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/guidance/your-employment-rights-individual-disability>

# Resources

---

- Workplace Inclusion Now (WIN)
  - <https://www.autismspeaks.org/workplace-inclusion-now>
- New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (NM DVR)
  - <https://www.dvr.state.nm.us/>
- Job Accommodation Network (JAN)
  - <https://askjan.org/>
- Autism Speaks
  - <https://www.autismspeaks.org/resource-guide>



## Resources cont.

---

- Autism Speaks Employment Toolkits
  - Free online resources for individuals with ASD and employers to improve workplace inclusion.
  - <https://www.autismspeaks.org/tool-kit/employment-tool-kit>
- Local Autism Support Organizations
  - Many nonprofits offer free employment readiness programs, job coaching, and peer mentoring
  - <https://autismsociety.org>
- Community Colleges & Libraries
  - Offer free workshops on resume building, interview skills, and workplace communication strategies.
- Online Support Groups & Forums
  - Free peer-to-peer support through groups like r/Autism on Reddit or Facebook autism employment groups.
- PFE School to Work Transition Library
  - <https://cdd.health.unm.edu/pfe/school-to-work-resources/>

## References

- Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. (n.d.). *A guide to executive function*. <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resource-guides/guide-executive-function/>
- Iannone, A., & Giansanti, D. (2023). Breaking barriers—the intersection of AI and assistive technology in autism care: A narrative review. *Journal of Personalized Medicine*, 14(1), 41. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jpm14010041>
- Leung, P. W. S., Li, S. X., Tsang, C. S. O., Chow, B. L. C., & Wong, W. C. W. (2021). Effectiveness of using mobile technology to improve cognitive and social skills among individuals with autism spectrum disorder: Systematic literature review. *JMIR Mental Health*, 8(9), e20892. <https://doi.org/10.2196/20892>

## References

- Palumbo, J. (2021, April 27). *Why Autism Speaks is encouraging companies to hire those on the autistic spectrum*. Forbes. [https://www.forbes.com/sites/jenniferpalumbo/2021/04/27/why-autism-speaks-is-encouraging-companies-to-hire-those-on-the-autistic-spectrum/:contentReference\[oaicite:3\]{index=3}](https://www.forbes.com/sites/jenniferpalumbo/2021/04/27/why-autism-speaks-is-encouraging-companies-to-hire-those-on-the-autistic-spectrum/:contentReference[oaicite:3]{index=3})
- Rast, J. E., Roux, A. M., & Shattuck, P. T. (2020). Use of vocational rehabilitation supports for postsecondary education among transition-age youth on the autism spectrum. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 50(6), 2164–2173. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-019-03972-8>
- Ohl, A., Grice Sheff, M., Small, S., Nguyen, J., Paskor, K., & Zanjirian, A. (2017). Predictors of employment status among adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Work (Reading, Mass.)*, 56(2), 345–355. <https://doi.org/10.3233/WOR-172492>
-

## References

- Wallace, G. L., Kenworthy, L., Pugliese, C. E., Popal, H. S., White, E. I., Brodsky, E., & Martin, A. (2016). Real-world executive functions in adults with autism spectrum disorder: Profiles of impairment and associations with adaptive functioning and co-morbid anxiety and depression. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 46(3), 1071–1083.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-015-2655-7>